Science, Nature and Politics: Margaret Cavendish's Challenge to Gender and Class Hierarchy

Elizabeth M. Walters

Ph.D. Literature
The University of Edinburgh
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I certify that all of the material herein is my own work.

Elizabeth M. Walters
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Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

Works by Margaret Cavendish

APC	"Assaulted and Pursued Chastity." *Margaret Cavendish The Blazing World and Other Writings*. London: Penguin Classics, 1994. 45-118.
NP	*Natures Pictures Drawn by Fancies Pencil to the Life*. London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1656.
OUEP	*Observations upon Experimental Philosophy, To which is added, The Description of a new Blazing World*. London: A. Maxwell, 1666.
PF	*Poems and Fancies*. London: J. Martin and J. Allestryre, 1653.
PPO	*Philosophical and Physical Opinions*. London, 1663.
PL	*Philosophical Letters: or, Modest Reflections Upon Some Opinions in Natural Philosophy, Maintained by Several Famous and Learned Authors of This Age, Expressed by Way of Letters*. London, 1664.
TPPO	*The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*. London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1655.
TBW	"The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World (1666)." *Margaret Cavendish The Blazing World and Other Writings*. London: Penguin Classics, 1994. 119-225.
TC	"The Contract." *Margaret Cavendish The Blazing World and Other Writings*. London: Penguin Classics, 1994. 1-44.
TWO	*The Worlds Olio*. London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1655.

Other Works

OED	Simpson, J.A. and E.S.C. Weiner, eds. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

Abstract

Margaret Cavendish has been understood as a problematic literary figure. Scholars generally conceive Cavendish's proto-feminism as being juxtaposed incongruously with staunch, hierarchical thinking. From this critical perspective, Cavendish's radical gender critique creates unintentional contradictions within her absolutist politics and her conservative ideology ultimately negates the value of her proto-feminist theories. This study addresses Cavendish's politics by exploring the political dimensions of her scientific and philosophical thought. Chapter 1 discusses how the patriarchal binaries that structure western scientific traditions and knowledges are subverted and redefined through Cavendish's theory of nature. Exploring how her science rejects, yet appropriates spirituality, the disruption of religious understandings of gender are investigated in Chapter 2. As Cavendish's depiction of religion challenges the spirit/matter and man/woman dichotomies, religious explanations of women's subordinate status are dismantled. Though Cavendish has been understood as a conservative thinker, Cavendish is much less problematic when understood outside the parameters of staunch royalist ideology. Chapter 3 examines Cavendish's theories of atoms and multiple worlds in relation to Hobbes and seventeenth-century political science, demonstrating that *The Blazing World* surprisingly challenges absolute politics. Cavendish's critique of class and gender hierarchy are further examined in Chapter 4 where texts such as *The Contract* and *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* advocate republican ideals such as popular sovereignty, the belief that a monarch's power should be limited and that tyrannicide is sometimes justifiable. Through exploring some of the more radical politics of her

time, these texts further consider women's identity in relation to early modern legislation while demonstrating that by republican definitions of liberty, women were slaves. Though scholarship tends to seek one opinion or voice within Cavendish's texts, this study will also contribute to a highly neglected aspect of her work by examining the meaning of Cavendish's multifarious voices and perspectives. Contrary to critical understandings of Cavendish, her contradictions were not incidental, but were part of a complex political and scientific project. Using plurality as a foundation for her theoretical thought, Cavendish's conception of an infinite and diverse nature could radically invoke limitless interpretations, knowledges, realities, worlds and even selves.

Introduction

I. The Myth of Mad Madge

It has become commonplace to initiate an analysis of seventeenth-century women writers by discussing Virginia Woolf. When Woolf was unable to find early modern women writers in libraries, she theorized that women's oppression had been so severe and pervasive that women were virtually unable to write at all.[1] Although many critics have used Woolf as a point of critical departure, it is nonetheless an extremely relevant and significant position since Woolf's commentary on early modern women has had a lasting impact, affecting the most contemporary of criticism. This is particularly the case for Margaret Cavendish. In her search for women authors, Woolf encountered Cavendish, but dismissed her work on the premise that the "crazy Duchess" who "frittered her time away scribbling nonsense," "has the freakishness of an elf, the irresponsibility of some non-human creature."[2] This attitude is reflected in *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* where Cavendish is uncritically described as "the crazy duchess" and "a woman of undoubted strangeness."[3] This reading of Cavendish deeply shaped the critical tradition where she was often understood as merely crazy, eccentric or freakish. For

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[1] Woolf reasoned that "any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at" (Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin Books, 1945) 51).

[2] Ibid. 63 and Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929) 108.

example, Sara Mendelson argues that contemporaries viewed "her life and work as the product of dementia" while Elaine Walker claims that Cavendish's contradictory ideas are possible symptoms of schizophrenia.[4] Though Sylvia Bowerbank argues that Cavendish's work is a deliberate reaction to the patriarchal age of reason, she claims Cavendish understood madness as feminine.[5] As a result, her literature is too contradictory, lacking in authority and only reminds the reader of an eccentric duchess.[6] Though this 'Mad Madge' approach to Cavendish suggests that her literature is a product of mental disorder, S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies reminds us that there has been a patriarchal double standard within contemporary criticism: "if Cavendish's psychological 'normality' is in question, such instability has never been regarded as detrimental to male authorship."[7]

Although Cavendish's madness and eccentricity has been over-emphasized, Woolf's assessment of her sanity further affected readings of Cavendish's philosophy and science. Woolf completely discredited the "crack-brained" Cavendish by claiming her "philosophies are futile" without supplying evidence or an analyses to support such a claim.[8] This attitude is reflected in contemporary criticism where critics such as Lisa T. Sarasohn argue that "most scholars who study Cavendish's work, such as Virginia Woolf, deplore the stultifying effect natural philosophy had

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[3] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, eds., *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English*, (1985) 72, qtd. in Marta Staznicky, "Reading the Stage: Margaret Cavendish and Commonwealth Closet Drama," *Criticism* 37.3 (1995): 355.

[4] Sara Heller Mendelson, *The Mental World of Stuart Women: Three Studies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987) 60 and Elaine Walker, "Longing For Ambrosia: Margaret Cavendish and the Torment of a Restless Mind in *Poems, and Fancies* (1653)," *Women's Writing* 4:3 (1997): 349.

[5] Sylvia Bowerbank, "The Spider's Delight: Margaret Cavendish and the 'Female' Imagination," *English Literary Renaissance* 14.3 (1984): 393, 394.

[6] Ibid. See pages 403,406-407.

[7] S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies, Introduction, *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama: Criticism, History, and Performance, 1594-1698*, eds. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (London: Routledge, 1998) 4.

on her poetic genius."[9] This was particularly damaging for critical understandings of Cavendish, who was foremost a philosopher and scientist, and who wrote many scientific treatises. Until very recently, her science was either not taken seriously, or more commonly, was not subject to scholarly analysis at all. Judith Moore complains that critics who "tacitly ignore Cavendish's career-long emphasis upon natural science, not only misrepresent her but in fact result in an undervaluation of the seriousness of her work."[10] Bowerbank exemplifies this attitude as she argues that Cavendish was "vain, inconsistent and silly; yet she took herself and her philosophy seriously," while Marilyn L. Williamson argues that Cavendish "never understood the arduous discipline needed for real achievement. She wanted to be a genuine philosopher, but she made a virtue of her ignorance."[11] Williamson further argues that "her independence and social standing kept her from admitting when she could not comprehend the thought of another writer," yet Williamson surprisingly does not provide examples of how this is so.[12]

Not only was Cavendish's sanity and thus, intellectual ability, in question throughout both Woolf's analysis and scholarship in general, Cavendish was perceived as a lonely, isolated and ridiculed author who was widely "dismissed as eccentric."[13] Line Cottegnies argues that though Cavendish published a large number

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[8] Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 108.

[9] Lisa T. Sarasohn, "A Science Turned Upside Down: Feminism and the Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish," *Huntington Library Quarterly: A Journal for the History and Interpretation of English and American Civilization* 47.4 (1984): 297.

[10] Judith Moore, "Twentieth-Century Feminism and Seventeenth-Century Science: Margaret Cavendish in Opposing Contexts," *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700* 26.1 (2002): 1-14.

[11] Bowerbank 406 and Marilyn Williamson, *Raising Their Voices: British Women Writers, 1650-1750* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990) 38.

[12] Ibid. 45.

[13] See Emma L. E. Rees, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) 3. Jean Gagen also argues that Cavendish's work "provoked amazement and

of works, she was "seemingly oblivious of the critics who saw her as an immodest eccentric."[14] The critical tradition has also frequently emphasized Cavendish's detachment from the intellectual world, claiming she bore no influence upon her society.[15] When discussing Cavendish's "sense of isolation," Sarasohn claims that her science was an "unimportant by-product of the Scientific Revolution" and she thus "had no influence in her own time."[16]

Although Cavendish scholarship has been affected by Woolf's assessment, Katie Whitaker explores Cavendish's intellectual relationships with eminent seventeenth century thinkers, establishing that contrary to previous criticism, Cavendish was perceived as an established intellectual who was heavily influenced by other scientists and writers.[17] Natalie Zemon Davis also argues that some women writers used Cavendish as a model for their historical writings.[18] Though Cavendish did receive some negative commentary from her contemporaries (which has been overemphasized in criticism), Anna Battigelli reminds that "it is important to

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polite admiration along with much secret ridicule." Samuel I. Mintz even claims that Cavendish's visit to the Royal Society provoked anxiety amongst its members since "the Duchess was at that time the laughing-stock of London; they feared that some of the laughter might be directed at them" (Jean Gagen, "Honor and Fame in the Works of the Duchess of Newcastle," *Studies in Philology* 56 (1959): 520; Samuel I. Mintz, "The Duchess of Newcastle's Visit to the Royal Society," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 51 (1952): 171, 172).

[14] Line Cottegnies, "The Garden and the Tower: Pastoral Retreat and Configurations of the Self in the Auto/Biographical Works of Margaret Cavendish and Lucy Hutchinson," *Mapping the Self: Space, Identity, Discourse in British Auto/Biography*, ed. Frédéric Regard (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 2003) 126.

[15] Williamson also portrays the image of the isolated eccentric in her claim that Cavendish "was too eccentric to have artistic progeny" and she thus "remained Mad Madge, a deviant who has no heirs." In a similar manner, Elaine Walker argues that her self-deprecating remarks were simply Cavendish "marginalising herself before others have the chance to humiliate her by doing so" (Williamson 59, 18 and Walker 347).

[16] Sarasohn 302, 297.

[17] Whitaker even notes that some of "Glanvill's books were clearly replies to Margaret's views" (see Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle: Royalist, Writer and Romantic* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2002) 324).

[18] Natalie Zemon Davis argues that an example of an individual who imitated Cavendish is Lucy Hutchinson. See Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women as Historical Writers," *Beyond Their Sex: Learned*

remember that others seemed to consider her something of an oracle."[19] This is reflected in the writings of Bathsua Makin who stated that Cavendish "by her own Genius, rather than any timely Instruction, over-tops many grave Gown-Men."[20] Whitaker further traces the remarkable and contrasting trends in early critical opinions. In the seventeenth-century, Cavendish was not only viewed as an established and respected writer, but a heroic woman.[21] For example, Joseph Glanvill claimed she was a "Heroine, whose Pen is as Glorious as [the duke's] Sword."[22] In an English bookseller's 1657 catalogue, Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies* was listed as being among the most vendible books in England.[23] Perceptions of Cavendish began to alter in the eighteenth-century when her work, which was highly censored, depicted and corresponded with ideal feminine virtue. Understandings of Cavendish shifted once again in the nineteenth century to the unfounded perception of her being an isolated, ridiculed eccentric whose writings never influenced the world around her, a belief that has influenced Woolf and criticism today.[24]

Women of the European Past, ed. Patricia H. Labalme (New York: New York University Press, 1984) 165.

[19] Anna Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998) 4.

[20] Bathsua Makin, *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* (1673) qtd. in Battigeli 4.

[21] Cavendish "had achieved a prominent place in English intellectual life" (Whitaker 325).

[22] Joseph Glanvill, *Letters and Poems*, 104, qtd. in Mihoko Suzuki, *Subordinate Subjects: Gender, the Political Nation, and Literary Form in England, 1588-1688* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) 190.

[23] The only other woman on this list was Anne Bradstreet. Patricia Caldwell, "Contextual Materials for "The Tenth Muse" by Anne Bradstreet," *Renaissance Women Online*, Brown University Women Writers Project, September 1999. http://textbase.wwp.brown.edu/cgi-bin/dynaweb-wwp/nph-dweb/dynaweb/wwptextbase/wwpRWO/@Generic__BookTextView/55390;hf=0;fs. 2 February 2005.

[24] See Whitaker, particularly the Epilogue that focuses on trends in critical thought.

II. The Schizophrenic Tradition

As Cavendish scholarship develops, there has been a determined effort in the last decade to discredit the Mad Madge approach. In her article, "Dismantling the Myth of Mad Madge," Hero Chalmers argues that "Cavendish's unusually forthright presentation of herself as a female author is not the product of psychological factors but of cultural and historical conditions, specifically those of Interregnum royalism."[25] As Cavendish's mental sanity or isolation becomes increasingly insignificant and inappropriate, a profoundly different Cavendish has emerged. As she is examined in relation to the intellectual climate of the seventeenth-century, scholars are discovering the considerable number of intellectuals whom she critiqued, appropriated or responded to within her literature and philosophy, demonstrating that though she lacked formal training, she was far from being uneducated.[26] Though Cavendish herself often reminds readers of her lack of education, Leslie Marina warns that it "is unhelpful at best and dangerous at worst, however, to let either her declarations of her singularity or her complaints about her lack of formal training blind us to her profound engagement with, and revision of, her intellectual and

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[25] Hero Chalmers, "Dismantling the Myth of "Mad Madge": the cultural context of Margaret Cavendish's authorial self-presentation," *Women's Writing* 4.3 (1997): 324.

[26] Two significant edited volumes about Cavendish, both published in 2003, specifically counter previous critical assumptions, claiming that scholarship will improve if Cavendish is placed within her historical and intellectual context. In his introduction to *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish*, Stephen Clucas argues that the "uneasiness that has marked Cavendish's scholarly reception in the past is currently being revised in the light of re-emergent contexts for her 'lack' of order and method" which "benefits from being located in appropriate discursive contexts" (Stephen Clucas, Introduction, *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish*, ed. Stephen Clucas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) 1, 2). In a similar manner, Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz, introduce their collection stating that it is their aim to explore her works and those of her contemporaries in contextualised, theoretically informed studies. Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz, Introduction, *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish*, eds. Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003) 8.

cultural milieu."[27] Sarah Hutton, who has recently made large contributions to contextualizing Cavendish's science, claims that while critics of Cavendish often acknowledge that "her science and philosophy do not fit with the mainstream as defined by twentieth-century history of science and philosophy, they have claimed for her pride of place in a separate, female tradition" and "it has become almost commonplace to underline the unlikeness of Cavendish's thought to the philosophy of her male contemporaries."[28] Yet this trend in criticism ignores her published essays and critiques on male intellectuals and the epistemological traditions that influence her thought.[29] Anna Battigelli, who has recently devoted an entire book to understanding Cavendish within the Scientific Revolution, argues that the very characteristics that have caused scholars to dismiss Cavendish, such as lack of method and her willingness to embrace contradictions, are historically significant attributes when understood in context of the scientific paradigms that were developing.[30] Accentuating the difference or strangeness of her literature inhibits Cavendish from being understood in her historical and literary context and neglects the influence she had upon her contemporaries and their effect upon her.[31]

What is emerging in scholarship, is a Cavendish who dynamically engaged with and challenged the scientific milieu of her time. Recent evaluations of her science has demonstrated how previous critical assumptions had ignored, dismissed

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[27] Marina Leslie, *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) 124.
[28] Sarah Hutton, "In Dialogue With Thomas Hobbes: Margaret Cavendish's Natural Philosophy," *Women's Writing* 4:3 (1997): 421.
[29] Ibid. 422.
[30] Battigelli 10.
[31] For a more in depth discussion with the problems of isolating Cavendish from her intellectual contemporaries, see Julie Sanders, "'A Woman Write a Play!': Jonsonian Strategies and the Dramatic Writings of Margaret Cavendish; or Did the Duchess Feel the Anxiety of Influence," *Readings in*

and de-contextualized her philosophical thought to such an extent that there are seemingly almost two entirely different Margaret Cavendishs. For example, regarding microscopes, Williamson argues that anything "Margaret was prohibited she discounted, and so she pooh-poohs the value of microscope, [. . .], despite the fact that she and the duke were given good ones by the leaders of scientific thought."[32] Although scholars may not be entirely clear of what a 'pooh-pooh' is, nonetheless, in this representation, Cavendish is depicted as an irrational, arrogant and spoiled child who hopelessly cannot conceive the value of the achievements of her male contemporaries. In stark contrast, Elizabeth Spiller has recently explored Cavendish's critique of optical instruments, examining how they provoked many philosophical problems in early modern thought. Comparing Cavendish and Galileo, Spiller claims that both scientists theorize about the significance of observation, yet ultimately conclude that it cannot discern truth since "the telescope and other new optic devices reveal how distortion is the basis for all acts of perception."[33] Both authors demonstrate the anxiety and epistemological conflicts surrounding the emergence of observation based science, visual technology, empiricism and how this affects conceptions of self, reality and truth.[34]

Another instance of what perhaps can be termed as critical schizophrenia in regards to Cavendish, can be found in scholarly approaches to Cavendish's mathematics. Though Roberto Bertuol does place Cavendish into a historical,

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Renaissance Women's Drama: Criticism, history, and performance, 1594-1998, eds. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (London: Routledge, 1998) 294.

[32] Williamson 45. Also, not only is the use of Cavendish's first name a practice of disrespect common in earlier Cavendish criticism, but it is a custom rarely done to male intellectuals.

[33] Elizabeth Spiller, "Reading Through Galileo's Telescope: Margaret Cavendish and the Experience of Reading," *Renaissance Quarterly* 53.1 (2000): 195.

[34] Ibid. 195-197.

scientific context, he claims Cavendish was uneducated and lacked proper insight into mathematics. As a consequence, her mathematical poetry represents the unsolvable conflict between male/female, reason/fancy and science/poetry.[35] Since men have been historically associated with reason and women with irrationality, the implications of this analysis suggests that women will never accomplish reasonable, scientific male pursuits.[36] In direct contrast, B. J. Sokol argues that though Cavendish was not formally educated in mathematics, she represented through poetry, mathematical theories of Thomas Harriot, which anticipated ideas leading to the development of infinitesimal calculus and conundrums of infinity, which have only recently been resolved and are still partly in question.[37] Far from being unable to understand mathematical concepts, she was actually participating in the most advanced mathematical theories of her time.

These examples illustrate how crucial it is for Cavendish to be understood within seventeenth-century scientific thought. The more scholarly research has been devoted to understanding and contextualizing her work, it becomes increasingly apparent that she was far from insane, irrational or uneducated, but rather an intellectual addressing complex theoretical issues in a highly creative, unconventional and complicated way. An understanding of Cavendish's theories, particularly in relation to the Scientific Revolution will facilitate not only an understanding of her philosophy, but will profoundly effect readings of her literature

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[35] Roberto Bertuol, "The Square Circle of Margaret Cavendish: the 17th-century conceptualization of mind by means of mathematics," *Language and Literature* 10.1 (2001): 21-40.

[36] For an in depth discussion of the historical association between women and irrationality in philosophy, see Genevieve Lloyd, "Reason, Science and the Domination of Matter," *Feminism and Science*, eds. Evelyn Fox Keller and Helen E. Longino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 43.

since she wrote extensively about science and often incorporated it into her fiction. In fact, her science and fiction can be understood as being one and the same. Eve Keller explains that although *The Blazing World* and *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* may seem the antithesis of each other since they are wholly "disparate in method and goal," there are significant similarities, "treating many of the same issues and offering many of the same arguments."[38] However, on "the whole, readers have seen *The Blazing World* as a form of wish-fulfillment" and "is routinely treated as Cavendish's apologetic retreat: unable to make a believable mark in the "real" and difficult world of fact."[39] If Cavendish's unconventional approach to science is interpreted as "wish-fulfillment" or arrogance rather than legitimate scientific analysis, than accordingly, her feminism is also merely egotism; not representing "real" politics. From this critical perspective, Cavendish's science and feminism only reflects her "desire for dominance within a traditional hierarchy" and consequently, her "immense egoism puffs out any incipient feminist feeling."[40] This interpretation results in a perception of Cavendish as ultimately unreasonable; paralleling aspects of the Mad Madge approach that not only neglected the intricacy and seriousness of her science, but ignored the scientific and philosophical ideas that fundamentally shape her fictional oeuvre.

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[37] B. J. Sokol "Margaret Cavendish's Poems and Fancies and Thomas Harriot's Treatise on Infinity," *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish*, ed. Stephen Clucas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) 156-170.

[38] Eve Keller, "Producing Petty Gods: Margaret Cavendish's Critique of Experimental Science," *English Literary History* 64.2 (1997): 460, 461.

[39] Ibid. 459.

[40] See Sarasohn 301 and Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing, and Fiction, 1660-1800* (London: Virago Press, 1989) 65.

III. Power, Politics and Literary Canons

The various Cavendishs that have emerged from within the different critical approaches demonstrate the intrinsic problems with literary analysis itself. Woolf's conclusion that early modern women were so oppressed that they could not write, was influential, not only for Cavendish studies, but for the broader field of early modern women's writing. Feminist criticism in the past thirty years has been reevaluating women's participation and status in literary culture. The assumption that early modern female authorship was unacceptable or abnormal has been revealed to be a problematic position. Margaret J. M. Ezell demonstrates that women writers were not an unusual phenomenon and that although female authorship was tolerated, "it is steadily maintained that women writing before the eighteenth century were rare and eccentric creatures, the exceptions, not the norm."[41] Cerasano and Wynne-Davies also argue that women authors were not unusual since early modern female dramatists "were perfectly well known in their own period and were subject of numerous panegyric commentaries."[42] Though scholars have stopped providing reasons or justifications for women's absence in the literary canon, (such as severe patriarchy and female illiteracy), some feminist critics have begun instead questioning the literary tradition itself. Cerasano and Wynne-Davies pose the crucial question: why have Renaissance women writers been neglected for so long and why

[41] Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) 581.
[42] S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies 1.

do they still provoke a certain amount of disbelief and hostility?[43] The animosity that is directed towards seventeenth-century female authors perhaps can best be understood through the function of anthologies. Ezell states that anthologies "help create and to confirm canons: their selections signal the reader what the critical community considers to be worthy of study and also what it considers to be the dominant critical framework in which the texts are to be read."[44] Since women are not confirmed within the traditional early modern canon, to acknowledge their literary significance requires a re-evaluation of the concept of literary history. Their existence demands a shift in consciousness and an acknowledgment that power structures, including gender hierarchies, have influenced what types of literature are considered important.

Although gender power relations are changing, feminist scholars are only beginning to rediscover the extent of female participation in literary culture. However, it is not just sexual politics which have created obstacles in the canonization of women authors, anachronistic perceptions of past writing practices also has hindered the recovery of women's writing. Though female authorship was tolerated, early modern culture was deeply suspicious of female publishing since publication indicated an immodest step into the public domain. Yet, scholarship tends to devalue women's participation in the manuscript form even though "manuscript circulation, not print, was the standard, traditional form of intellectual exchange for men and women."[45] Publication was perceived as vulgar especially among the aristocracy. The contemporary practice of placing value on publications

[43] Ibid. 4.
[44] Ezell 580.

over manuscripts insinuates that texts are validated only by their market value. However, early modern writers, did not always write with the intention for profit or status and many genres such as prayers, letters and religious prophesy are heavily devalued based on the assumption that they were not intended for public, financial recognition.[46] Furthermore, many early modern literary forms such as polemical writings, manuscript circulation and political treatises, demonstrate collaborate authorship where many individuals, sometimes over many generations, may have participated in one single textual piece; contrasting with the contemporary emphasis upon one single author who gains prestige and status over a publication.[47] Readings of women authors such as Cavendish, who did publish their literature, will also be affected by the devaluing of non-published literary forms. Ignoring the large amounts of nonpublished writings by women, contributes to the unfounded perception that women who wrote were rare and eccentric in their time; a view that will effect interpretations of their literature. Though it is not my intention in this work to provide solutions to the problems intrinsic to literary canons, it is nonetheless important when examining the history of Cavendish scholarship, (and arguably any author), to understand that literary hierarchies and anachronisms are intrinsic within the construction of what is deemed valuable literature and these perceptions will effect understandings of literature.

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[45] Donne and Sidney demonstrate that circulating a text in manuscript form did not prevent individuals from having public reputations as authors. See Ezell 588.
[46] Margaret J. M. Ezell, "Women and Writing," *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. Anita Pacheco (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002) 77-94.
[47] Ibid. 77-94.

IV. Politics and Contradictions

As critics have shifted away from the Mad Madge interpretation and have attempted to contextualize her work, scholars are also increasingly understanding her literature as participating in overtly royalist politics. It is a common critical assumption that Cavendish was a royalist who advocated class hierarchy and the view that she was an ardent royalist has become a focal point.[48] Though politicizing Cavendish has been extremely useful and is part of the overall project of contexualization, many scholars have described her royalist ideology as invalidating her feminist theory. For example, Kate Lilley argues that the "egalitarian potential of her sexual critique is, however, seriously curtailed by an equally powerful commitment to the prerogatives of absolute monarchy and hierarchical privilege."[49] This interpretation conceives Cavendish's politics as being unintentionally contradictory. From this critical frame of reference, critics such as Rachel Trubowitz perceive Cavendish as being "driven by the competing demands of the Duchess's radical feminism and social conservatism." As a consequence, she is "stymied between the diverging paths of absolutism and feminism, so that each system undermines her allegiance to the other."[50] The function of her contradictory thought is not explored in itself, but is caused by a desire to maintain stringent hierarchical class structures, while simultaneously aspiring to more gender equality. Though this

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[48] Emma Rees has devoted an entire book to Cavendish's use of genre and how it critiques Puritanism and supports the royalist cause. See Rees.

[49] Kate Lilley, Introduction, *Margaret Cavendish: The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (London: Penguin Classics, 1992) xiv.

[50] Rachel Trubowitz, "The Reenchantment of Utopia and the Female Monarchical Self: Margaret Cavendish's Blazing World," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 1.2 (1992): 229; Judith Kegan

attitude is frequently expressed in scholarship, Maria Isabel Calderon argues that although many critics have understood Cavendish's contradictions as unintentional, her contradictions not only strategically veil her subversive thought, but also were part of her larger project of dismantling and rebelling against classical epistemology and its understanding of reason, fancy, and human/gender hierarchy.[51]

The aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate that in contrast to Cavendish scholarship, Cavendish's contradictions were not unintentional, nor were they merely used to challenge gender inequities for personal reasons, but were part of a complex political project to critique both class and gender hierarchies. Mihoko Suzuki, the only critic to date that has discussed Cavendish's radical class politics, reminds that women were expected to share the political affiliations of their husbands or male relatives. In her discussion of apprentices and wives, she claims that "both groups were excluded from being political "subjects" because they were supposedly represented by their masters and husbands."[52] Though women's political identity in theory, was incorporated into that of the patriarch, Suzuki discusses how many women may have had personal, political beliefs that did not correlate with their family's official view. Cavendish in particular, often surprisingly presents parliamentarian ideas even though her husband was a royalist war hero. Her method of presenting dialogues and debates on many sides of an issue strategically allows Cavendish to express republican ideas that can be safely bracketed or disclaimed by

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Gardiner, "'Singularity of Self': Cavendish's *True Relation*, Narcissism, and the Gendering of Individualism, *Restoration* 21.2 (1997): 53.

[51] Maria Isabel Calderon, "'Angry I was, and Reason strook away': Margaret Cavendish and her lyrical acts of rebellion," *Re-shaping the Genres: Restoration Women Writers*, eds. Zenón Luis-Martínez and Jorge Figueroa-Dorrego (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003) 19-48.

[52] Suzuki 145.

the presence of more conservative statements.[53] "The fact that her oppositional views have been largely neglected in favor of her espousal of the dominant discourse indicates the success of her strategy of drawing attention away from her more radical ideas in order to avoid "Publick censures" of her feminist and republican views."[54] Though I agree with Suzuki's argument, it is also my contention that contradictions further provide a basis for her philosophical thought. Through exploring the neglected areas in her literature that express radical class politics, I will demonstrate that perhaps royalist and parliamentarian systems were not entirely incompatible in Cavendish's philosophical system. For example, in *Nature's Pictures*, Cavendish argues that though monarchy is a political system that works very well for bees, ants equally benefit from a parliamentarian style government. Bees and ants illustrate how different, contradictory systems can both simultaneously be valid or useful structures within the natural world: "for the Monarchical Government of the Bees is as wise and happy as the Republick Commonwealth of the Ants" (*NP* 165). However, both governments are also simultaneously imperfect systems since both demonstrate that "there is no secure Safety, nor perfect Felicity, nor constant Continuance in the Works of Nature" (*NP* 166). The analogy of the bees and ants portray how contradiction and plurality are principles that found Cavendish's theoretical thought, creating liminal spaces that deliberately manipulate political and scientific discourse. However, it is not my intention to entirely invalidate critical evaluations of the royalist, conservative aspects of her thought; indeed I am very indebted to many scholars from this critical framework whose ideas have been useful

[53] Ibid. 189.
[54] Ibid. 202.

to this project.[55] Yet, her literature becomes much less problematic or 'contradictory' when understood as a complex system that embraces contradictions, redefining class and gender politics, rather than purely espousing stringent conservative values.

V. Cavendish and Contemporary Theory

Since Cavendish's feminism has generally been perceived as problematic, regardless of what critical framework she is being analyzed from, exploring the radical aspects of Cavendish's politics will hopefully cause a re-evaluation of the significance of Cavendish's proto-feminist theory; particularly since Cavendish provides some of the most radical gender critiques of her era. For example, regarding female education, Cavendish argues that many believe

> it impossible we should have either learning or understanding, wit or judgement, as if we had not rational souls as well as men, and we out of a custom of dejectednesse think so too, which makes us quit all [] industry towards profitable knowledge being imployed onely in looe, and pettie imployments, which takes away not onely our abilities towards arts, but higher capacities in speculations, so as we are become like worms that onely live in the dull earth of ignorance (*TPPO* sig. 1v)

If women are excluded from knowledge and learning, then their ignorance appears natural and normal. Not only men, but women themselves, out of a 'custom of dejectednesse' will internalize and naturalize their inferiority. As a consequence of women's lack of education, Cavendish argues that women are "shut out of all power, and Authority by reason we are never imployed either in civil nor marshall affaires,

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[55] I am particularly indebted for my understanding of Cavendish's conception of self to the influential ideas of Catherine Gallagher. See Catherine Gallagher, "Embracing the Absolute: Margaret Cavendish and the Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England," *Early Women Writers: 1600-1720*, ed. Anita Pacheco (London: Longman, 1998) 133-146.

our counsels are despised, and laught at, the best of our actions are troden down with scorn" (*TPPO* sig.1v).

Though Cavendish voices many proto-feminist concerns regarding women's exclusion from politics and knowledge, and her fiction often portrays women successfully playing masculine roles, she also provides valuable criticism regarding the gendered metaphors within mechanical philosophy, which later developed in contemporary science. Indeed, Keller argues that Cavendish's philosophy "contributes to the now-ongoing revision of the history of early-modern science, specifically because it relocates gender-inflected analysis back into the seventeenth-century and thereby demonstrates the availability of *contemporary* critiques of science as a rational inquiry into value- and gender-neutral truth."[56] Although Cavendish theorized within a different historical context, in some respects, she shares similar concerns with contemporary feminism in her critique of scientific objectivity in relation to gender and power. For example, Elisabeth Lloyd argues that the claim to objectivity is overtly political since "scientific views about gender differences and the biology of women have been the single most powerful political tool against the women's movement."[57] It is more difficult to question or challenge social inequalities when they are perceived as being a tragic bias of nature, rather than culture. Lloyd demonstrates the gendering of biology, citing examples of how scientists have blatantly excluded data about female macaque sexuality that did not conform to heterosexual, patriarchal gender roles, arguing that "evolutionary explanations of female sexuality exemplify how social beliefs and social agendas can

[56] Keller 452.

influence very basic biological explanations of fundamental physiological processes."[58] If gender roles are induced by nature, effecting human and animal alike, they are fixed, universal and ultimately unchangeable.

Patriarchal assumptions are more difficult to challenge when a supposed objective knowledge is entrenched within a gendered value system. Keller claims that in general science "bears the imprint of its genderization not only in the ways it is used but in the description of reality it offers."[59] Since scientific discourse is not perceived to be driven by value-judgements, the sexism in science and the resulting confirmation of the social order, paradoxically appears value-neutral, and consequently, more difficult to question. As society becomes more science based, it becomes crucial for feminists to recognize the ideology that is implicit within the construction of contemporary scientific knowledge.

The feminist critique of objectivity is not an attempt to invalidate the success of science; but it aims to place science within its political context since "different collections of facts, different focal points of scientific attention, but also different organizations of knowledge, different interpretations of the world, are both possible and consistent with what we call science."[60] If theorists are attempting to recognize the ideology within contemporary scientific discourse, it would be useful to this project to evaluate a philosopher, such as Margaret Cavendish, who was providing a gender critique of the new science at its birth. Like contemporary feminist critics,

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[57] Elisabeth Lloyd, "Pre-Theoretical Assumptions in Evolutionary Explanations of Female Sexuality," *Feminism and Science*, eds. Evelyn Fox Keller and Helen E. Longino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 100, 101.
[58] Ibid. 91-102.
[59] Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) 78, 79.
[60] Ibid. 5.

Cavendish discusses the gendering of science and specifically the problems with objectivity. Rather than understanding knowledge as a whole, monolithic and value-neutral structure, Cavendish compares "Several Knowledges to Several Languages" (*PPO* 271) depicting knowledge as diverse, contradictory and interpretative since they are akin to different language systems.

> as for Example, Put the case, Latine were the Natural Language to a Man's Figure, and that he knew none other Language, then of Necessity all other Languages, as Greek, Hebrew, French, Dutch, English, or any other Language whatsoever, must necessarily be as Nonsense to him, being Ignorant in those Languages (*PPO* 271)

Although different languages are like ordered systems of knowledge, if a person only speaks one language, it can be perceived as the only medium for communicating the 'real' world. Just as one system of knowledge may not be able to ascertain other conflicting conceptions of reality and truth, languages can appear unrecognizable and even irrational to each other. "Thus Several Knowledges" are often "no more Known to each other than Different languages" (*PPO* 172).[61] From this perspective, language cannot be a neutral, all-encompassing medium. Keller argues that various languages would interpret the world in diverse ways and in order to describe a phenomenon through language "there must be participation in a community of common practices, shared conceptions of the meaning of terms and their relation to "objects" in the real world."[62] Language is the method in which knowledge is

[61] Interestingly, Cavendish defines altered states of consciousness, such as trances, as being an instance when an individual understands another form of knowledge that is not proper to their physical form or species. She uses the analogy of language, arguing that a person may normally speak one language, but when in a trance they understand another. She concludes that trances cause creatures to understand different types of reason that are not typical to their kind. Though the knowledge gained in the trance is just as valid as any other type of wisdom, the individual forgets as their bodies regulate again. However, "if the Natural language, which is the Natural knowledge" never normalizes, than their knowledge is never comprehensible to others and they are stigmatized as a "Fool, or Ideot, or Irrational Creature" (*PPO* 272).

[62] Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, 130.

collectively organized and cannot be entirely severed from metaphor and interpretation. As Cavendish uses the example of language to portray the multiplicity and plurality of contradictory knowledges, she suggests that both knowledge and language are not objective or fixed mediums for understanding the world. In contemporary theory, Deborah Cameron, also argues that language is not neutral since "the masculine/feminine opposition pervades the English language and its conceptual metaphoric structure" and "the masculine/feminine dichotomy has entered very deeply into the system of linguistic analysis we call grammar."[63] Yet, whatever is considered masculine is also more highly valued, thus "we are dealing not just with a (constructed) *difference*, but with a *hierarchy*."[64]

However, it is not just feminist theorists who expose the politics of language; Mikhail Bakhtin conceives language as political in itself. He argues that, although linguistics often understands language as an abstract, static and neutral medium which is then used to express subjective ideas, language can instead be "conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion" since "there are no "neutral" words and forms."[65] Yet, there is not one uniform value-system in a single national language since all languages contain what Bakhtin terms heteroglossia, a multiplicity of social languages all of which have their own politics and ideology. For example, "the lawyer, the doctor, the businessman, the politician, the public education teacher" have languages that "differ from each other not only in

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[63] Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1992) 85.

[64] Ibid. 84. An obvious example is the practice of using the generic *he*, rather than the plural *they*, to describe an individual who could be both man or woman. Though this has been understood as an objective consequence of language structures and was, until recently, seen as a trivial concern, it was actively and purposely included into the standardization of the English language. Though the plural *they* was more standard, eighteenth century grammarians argued that since "the male is superior in nature, so this should be mirrored in grammar" (Ibid. 96).

their vocabularies; they involve specific forms for manifesting intentions, forms for making conceptualization and evaluation concrete."[66] These languages, which are permeated with different values, constantly intersect, merge and contradict, creating more languages. Each communicative act participates in the struggles of heteroglossia. For example, Carol Cohn, an anti-nuclear war activist, discusses her experience at a nuclear strategic analysis workshop where she was initially appalled at the description of nuclear warfare. Yet, the more she learned to speak the associated discourse, nuclear warfare was sanitized, stripped of destruction and mass death. Cohn found that this altered her perspectives and attitudes. "But the better I became at this discourse, the more difficult it became to express my own ideas and values. While the language included things I had never been able to speak about before, it radically excluded others" such as human suffering.[67] The discourse of nuclear warfare was contained within an ideological framework that powerfully codified the experience, creating a specific interpretation that did not correlate with her previous perspective. Although she was still seemingly speaking within the same language, English, she nonetheless found herself immersed in another system or organization of knowledge which contradicted and could not adequately correlate with her previous belief system. Since language, as Bakhtin understands it, is a dynamic process of active politics, the various languages are constantly interacting, and the individuals must constantly negotiate with the multitude of discourses that

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[65] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," *The Norton Anthology: Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2001) 1198 and 1214.
[66] Ibid. 1211.
[67] Carol Cohn, "Nuclear Language and How We Learned to Pat the Bomb," *Feminism and Science*, eds. Evelyn Fox Keller and Helen E. Longino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 180.

confront them, as they attempt to maintain their own language and values. Bakhtin argues that

> language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention [. . .] And not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property: many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them; they cannot be assimilated into his context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker.[68]

The individual is actively part of the historical and political process of language and must continuously struggle with heteroglossia to make language correspond more closely to their own values. "Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents is a difficult and complicated process."[69] As Cohn demonstrates, the more dominant one language system becomes, the more difficult it is to appropriate the language into another value-system.

Like Bakhtin and Cohn, Cavendish from her own historical perspective is illustrating how one language could not adequately or objectively express the entire natural world. In *The Blazing World*, the Empress asks whether Adam named all of the various types of fish in existence. "No, answered the spirits, for he was an earthly, and not a watery creature, and therefore could not know the several sorts of fishes" (*The Blazing World* 178). Though the spirits claim that Adam named the "prime sorts" that were presented to him, he could not name every individual since "as they did increase, so do their names" (*TBW* 178). Adam was unable to adequately name and define the infinite amount of animals in the natural world, demonstrating the

[68] Bakhtin 1215.
[69] Ibid. 1215.

limited nature of language; how it cannot express all aspects of natural phenomenon. The biblical story of Adam naming animals was overtly hierarchical since it indicated human and male dominance. This notion of hierarchy caused by language was also reflected in the ideas of seventeenth-century scientists such as Descartes, Hobbes and Bacon, who argued that language was the cause of human supremacy.[70] According to Bacon, Adam's power was explicitly linked to his ability to name animals; "for whensoever he shall be able to call the creatures by their true names he shall again command them."[71] Yet, the hierarchy induced by language is complicated in *The Blazing World* as the distinctions between animals and humans are collapsed and hybrid creatures populate the world. These creatures are just as capable of reason and civility as humans, questioning the human/animal distinction.

Since hybrid animals share the ability to use language with humans, and Adam cannot name all animals, objectivity through language would be unattainable since nature cannot be adequately expressed by one discourse. Indeed, in the Cavendish epistemology, there are innumerable and unfathomable aspects of the natural world since "Nature is so far beyond or above Art, as Art is Lost and Confounded in the Search of Nature, for Nature being Infinite, and Art Finite, they cannot Equalize each other" (*PPO* sig. d2r).[72] Human skill or knowledge cannot understand the infinite complexities of Nature.

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[70] Holly Faith Nelson, "'Worms in the Dull Earth of Ignorance': Zoosemiotics and Sexual Politics in the Works of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle," *English Language Notes* 39.4 (2002): 12-24. Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Champaigne: University of Illinois Press, 2002) 108.

[71] Francis Bacon, "Valerius Terminus," *The Works of Francis Bacon*, Vol. III (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1928) 222.

[72] *The Oxford English Dictionary* states that seventeenth-century definitions of art included "Human skill as an agent" and "human workmanship" (*OED* 657).

Although critiquing contemporary scientific practices, some feminist critics have also emphasized that "the complexity of nature exceeds our own imaginative possibilities."[73] Keller suggests that the solution to how science can function, yet simultaneously be aware of its subjectivity, would be not to perceive science as universal laws, but as an ordering of knowledge that is subject to change.

> The concept of order, wider than law and free from its coercive, hierarchical, and centralizing implications, has the potential to expand our conception of science. Order is a category comprising patterns of organization that can be spontaneous, self-generated, *or* externally imposed[74]

Knowledge and notions of truth both function to organize, interpret and make sense of the world. Keller envisions a science that is aware of its social and political context and perhaps less susceptible to normalizing or naturalizing belief systems. Cavendish also believed that science and natural philosophy could be aware of its subjectivity and could exist within different and contradictory ideological paradigms or orders. The aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate that Cavendish's conception of an infinite and diverse nature could invoke limitless interpretations, creating endless amounts of worlds, truths, knowledges, realities and even selves.

The intention of this project is also to demonstrate how Cavendish used multiple philosophical and political systems to create an epistemology that challenged fundamental early modern understandings of gender. Exploring an extremely neglected aspect of Cavendish's thought, I further aim to demonstrate how class hierarchies are redefined and subverted as she explores the more revolutionary theories in seventeenth-century political thought. Since scientific and philosophical theories are the foundation and point of departure for Cavendish's multi-faceted

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[73] Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, 162.

politics, Chapter 1 will address the complexity of Cavendish's traversing of various binaries such as male/female, reason/irrationality and mind/body within her scientific treatise, *Philosophical Letters*. Cavendish creates a scientific theory of nature that not only disrupts traditional gendered dualisms, but further challenges and redefines the patriarchal assumptions within the foundation of western science and knowledge. Cavendish's intricate science which includes animism, materialism, atoms and theories of multiple worlds, results in subverting the epistemological foundations that construct assumptions of natural sex inequalities. Throughout the text, concepts linked with or considered naturally masculine, such as reason, mind, spirit, activity and power are intermixed with the cultural definitions of femininity and its associations with irrationality, body, nature, passivity and natural inferiority. As Cavendish presents her scientific theories in the form of a female letter correspondence, a form that parallels and mirrors the gender subversion in her science, she demonstrates how gender ideology is sustained and sanctioned as truth through multiple cultural practices.

Since scientific theories of sex differences paralleled religious understandings of gender, Chapter 2 will explore how Cavendish's science disrupts religious understandings of spirit/matter, man/woman and the gendered spiritual hierarchy that results from such dichotomies. Though Cavendish was unusually secular in her scientific approach, science and religion were intrinsically connected. How one understood natural phenomenon affected an individual's perception of both religion and politics. Thus, a secular approach to science would implicate and possibly challenge religious doctrine. Though Cavendish was a dedicated materialist, her

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[74] Ibid. 132.

science and literature often paradoxically demonstrate an interest in witchcraft, fairies and hermetic science; a philosophy entirely reliant upon the belief in spiritual and magical concepts. This chapter will explore Cavendish's scientific interpretation of spirituality, witchcraft and hermetic philosophy, demonstrating how Cavendish rejects while simultaneously appropriates spiritual beliefs, using them to create a unique scientific and political outlook. The result is a philosophical system that dismantles religious explanations for women's subordinate status and further challenges theories that justified the widespread prosecution and execution of witches, whom were typically women.

Though Cavendish provides an acute critique of gender in philosophical traditions, as previously mentioned, her proto-feminism is often perceived as being juxtaposed incongruously within staunch monarchical politics. Chapter 3 will illustrate how it becomes much less contradictory and problematic when understood in context of both Cavendish's scientific ideology and seventeenth-century political science. For example, *The Blazing World* explores power and dominance in relation to absolute monarchy, demonstrating many parallels with Hobbes' royalist, secular philosophy. However, when placing *The Blazing World* in context of Cavendish's atomism and scientific theories of multiple worlds, the text ultimately indicates much more radical politics where all individuals are equal and have a free-will that needs to be exercised. Though characters often voice the opinion that monarchy is a political structure that provides the most stability and security, stability is ultimately proved to be unattainable, not only in political systems, but in all aspects of natural phenomenon. Yet, this instability is necessary for the universe to function. As a consequence, power, economics and order become illusory and intangible concepts,

challenging the basic epistemological foundations of monarchy and hierarchical politics.

Gender and monarchy are further examined from the perspective of seventeenth-century political theory in Chapter 4. Though *The Contract* has been understood as demonstrating a post-revolutionary royalist commitment to condemn the breaking of the original and irrevocable contract between Charles and his subjects, Cavendish actually complicates and problematizes absolutism and royalist conceptions of contract theory. Rather than advocating monarchy, *The Contract* strikingly portrays the republican rationale that a monarch's power should be subject to the law and that only adults can consent to a political government. Other political theories that justified absolute monarchy are also destabilized as patriarchalism, the belief that fathers were originally kings, is also questioned as disobeying fathers ironically induces social stability. Patriarchalism is also turned upside down in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* through the complications of a father/daughter adopted relationship. Both stories redefine and challenge hereditary rights and bloodline, situating individual merit over titles while further advocating popular sovereignty, as opposed to divine right. *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* also uses political theories regarding property rights and slavery to not only demonstrate that a monarch's power must be limited, but more remarkably, that tyrannicide is sometimes justifiable. Women's status and identity are also explored as Cavendish juxtaposes property rights, definitions of slavery, with both rape legislature and ideals of female chastity, demonstrating that women, by legal definition in early modern Britain, were in fact slaves.

Though Cavendish has been understood as a conservative, pro-hierarchy aristocrat with some inconsistent proto-feminist views, this project intends to contribute to an understanding and re-evaluation of Cavendish's complex politics. Through multiple worlds, selves, perspectives and a powerfully infinite nature, plurality and contradiction become a foundation for politics - a politics that challenges authority, hierarchy and notions of a stable, objective reality. From this perspective, perhaps it is somewhat appropriate that multiple, contradictory interpretations of Cavendish have emerged in the critical tradition.

1

Gender Subversion in the Science of Cavendish

Cavendish is best known for her plays, poetry and fiction, yet she also wrote many scientific and philosophical treatises that redefine and challenge the patriarchal assumptions within the scientific tradition. Throughout *Philosophical Letters,* concepts within science and culture that were considered naturally masculine, such as reason, mind, spirit, activity and power are intermixed with the cultural definitions of femininity and its associations with nature, irrationality, body, passivity and natural inferiority. Cavendish recognizes the multifaceted aspects of power and examines the ideologies that make inequalities appear natural and thus, unquestionable. Cavendish's intricate science that includes animism, materialism, atoms and theories of multiple worlds, results in subverting the foundations of scientific knowledge and reason that maintain ideas of natural sex inequalities. Cavendish does not simply criticize gender inequality, but her theories further challenge patriarchal metaphors embedded within the foundations of science and Western culture: values that are still prevalent within contemporary Western thought.[1]

[1] Eve Keller notes that Cavendish's critique upon the new science has a resemblance to contemporary criticism of scientific discourse; there is "a rather startling similarity between Cavendish's position and a post-Kuhnian and even a proto-feminist critique of the rational bases of mechanical science" (Evelyn Fox Keller, "Producing Petty Gods: Margaret Cavendish's Critique of Experimental Science," *English Literary History* 64.2 (1997): 451).

In contemporary theory, Judith Butler argues that feminist critics often theorize from within a patriarchal model rather than questioning the rationale and epistemology that supports and justifies inequity.

> Categories of true sex, discrete gender, and specific sexuality have constituted the stable point of reference for a great deal of feminist theory and politics. These constructs of identity serve as the points of epistemic departure from which theory emerges and politics itself is shaped.[2]

If feminists base their theory upon an essentialist notion of gender identity, than critics continue to work within a patriarchal theoretical paradigm. Gendered constructions of knowledge will appear 'natural' as it corresponds with and reflects perceptions of sexual politics within culture.

Although Cavendish was writing in the seventeenth-century, she perceived the relation between power, epistemology, knowledge and truth. Cavendish deconstructs various dichotomies and categories, demonstrating how value systems and social hierarchy are maintained and reaffirmed through various institutions and knowledges, giving the appearance of a stable, unchanging truth. Rather than working within a patriarchal framework and accepting gender roles as a permanent truth, Cavendish conceives how the world is structured in gender/power relations and attempts to restructure the gendered assumptions that founded seventeenth-century culture and science.

Cavendish developed a science that utilized ideas from various traditions, yet her science challenges cultural codes that determine what was considered masculine and feminine within philosophy by redefining nature itself. Nature and woman have been historically associated together throughout Western culture. Rational

knowledge is often depicted as male and in direct opposition to an irrational, female Nature. In ancient Greek thought, which greatly influenced early modern science, maleness was often aligned with active, determinate form and femaleness with passive, indeterminate matter. Within these gendered dichotomies ideas associated with maleness were superior to its opposite.[3] This link between women, Nature and body, opposed to reason or spirit, justified the conviction that women needed to be controlled and subordinated.[4]

In order to understand Cavendish's method and strategy for subverting understandings of nature, it will be necessary to examine seventeenth-century science. Historian Hugh Kearney claims that early modern science can be loosely organized into three main scientific traditions; the scholastic, magic and mechanic sciences, all of which can be defined by their approach to nature. Mechanical philosophy, which eventually evolved into modern science, used the metaphor of a machine to describe the natural world; the magic or hermetic tradition which included astronomy and chemistry, understood nature as a piece of artwork or music to be mastered by the magician; and scholastic science, which was taught in universities, used analogies of organisms to depict natural phenomenon.[5] Although all three sciences had different outlooks upon the world and often contradicted each other, all maintained a gendered view of nature.

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[2] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 128.

[3]Genevieve Lloyd, "Reason, Science and the Domination of Matter," *Feminism and Science*, eds. Evelyn Fox Keller and Helen E. Longino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). 43.

[4] David Booy, *Personal Disclosures: an Anthology of Self-Writings from the Seventeenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2002) 225.

[5] Hugh Kearney, *Science and Change, 1500-1700* (London: World University Press, 1971).

Like the various scientific traditions, Cavendish explicitly defines nature and matter as female, yet she challenges the patriarchal values embedded within this metaphor. She claims that there is no rest in nature and that this constant movement is not induced by an external force since "nature hath a natural Free-will and power of self-moving" (*PL* 225). Nature is not merely an empty, lifeless body that is governed, but is capable of movement within itself. Nature is an active, moving, powerful being for "matter is not meerly Passive, but always Active" (*PL* 145). In reversing the active/passive dichotomy, associations between body, nature and woman with passivity are disrupted.

I. Mechanical Science

If Nature is one active, self-moving, continued body, then it must sustain itself without the aid of any external or supernatural power. Mechanical science is questioned in her rejection of the idea that movement is caused by an external force since this science portrayed nature as a motionless machine moved or set into motion by God. In contrast, Cavendish argues that external forces cannot govern nature since "Nature moveth not by force, but freely" (*PL* 23). This theory applies to all natural phenomena "for if matter moveth it self, as certainly it doth, then the least part of Matter, were it so small as to seem Individable, will move it self" (*PL* 21). Within this framework, even the smallest or seemingly insignificant bodies are capable of self-movement. This contradicts the fundamental principle of mechanist

thought, the metaphor of the universe as machine. According to the analogy, if the universe is a lifeless machine, then force must be used for motion to occur.[6]

If all motion is caused by self-movement, then the force envisioned by mechanists would disorder the natural world rather than frame it into a functioning instrument.

> For these violent motions would rather have disturbed and disordered Nature; and though Nature uses variety in her motions or actions, yet these are not extravagant, nor by force or violence, but orderly, temperate, free, and easie (*PL* 107).

Although she agrees that force can create local motions, it does not create all movement.[7] A lifeless machine or body that only moves through external forces depicts a vision of the universe that contains violent connotations, particularly in context of its gender associations. Nature is a passive, lifeless entity that is forcefully and even violently moved.

This conception of nature relates to the mechanist, Francis Bacon, whose ideas founded the Royal Society, who used the metaphor of a feminine nature that is raped and dominated by a male scientist for knowledge. Bacon discusses how previous science, the "true sons of knowledge," has been trying to "find a way at length into [nature's] inner chambers,"[8] yet has failed to discover her secrets, "though it grasps and snatches at nature, yet can never take hold of her. Certainly what is said of opportunity of fortune is most true of nature; she has a lock in front, but is bald

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[6] For example, Cavendish explicitly argues against the Hobbesian belief that "when a thing lies still, unless somewhat else stir it, it will lie still for ever" (*PL* 21).

[7] "for Nature and her creatures know of no rest, but are in a perpetual motion, though not always exterior and local, yet they have their proper and certain motions, which are not so easily perceived by our grosser senses" (*PL* 447,448).

[8] Francis Bacon, "The Novum Organum," *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 1 (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1928) 64.

behind."[9] Though Bacon's metaphor depicts Nature as difficult to grasp, nonetheless she is a passive, female body to penetrate and violate by male reason for the pursuit of knowledge. The male/female binary is utilized to portray a relation between knowledge and sexual power. Power can be obtained over nature as man has power over woman. However, it was not just Bacon that evoked such sinister analogies. Eve Keller argues that in mechanism, the "metaphors of violence against women [were] employed routinely to describe the relationship between the powerful force of the male scientist's mind and the resistant but ultimately submissive body of nature."[10] Consequently, the mutually reaffirming metaphors linking women and nature potently demonstrates Bacon's claim that "human knowledge and human power meet in one."[11]

Cavendish disrupts the notion of power linked with reason as she argues that nature is incomprehensible and diminishes the idea of human grandeur and mastery in comparison to the natural world. Nature and 'femininity' are not only active, but they are also endued with reason and knowledge.

> But Nature is wiser then any of her Creatures can conceive; for she knows how to make, and how to dissolve, form, and transform, with facility and ease, without any difficulty; for her actions are all easie and free, yet so subtil, curious and various, as not any part or creature of Nature can exactly or throughly trace her ways, or know her wisdom (*PL* 476, 477).

Nature and its associations with woman, is not a passive vehicle to be mastered since it is not only wise, but also an entity beyond human understanding.

Although nature is wise, active and self-moving, Cavendish does paradoxically use an active/passive dualism in her descriptions of matter. Yet, she

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[9] Ibid. 153.
[10] Keller 447.
[11] Bacon 68.

seems to use these concepts in order to deconstruct them and their associated gender ideologies. She claims there are two types of matter within nature, animate and inanimate, but they are so thoroughly intermixed that nothing can exist without both, "by reason in all parts of nature there is a commixture of animate and inanimate matter" (*PL* 99). Although Cavendish creates this distinction, all bodies always contain both aspects, thus all matter is able to be in continual motion "for the animate forces or causes the inanimate matter to work with her; and thus one is moving, the other moved." Since every part of nature has both types of matter, everything is simultaneously active and passive, as it moves and is moved.

An infinitely complex, moving and wise Nature would not fit neatly within the common early modern rhetorical figure of the Book of Nature, a concept used by many mechanical philosophers to distinguish their methods from previous sciences.[12] The analogy of Nature as a book indicates that scientists should not rely upon the traditionally valued books of antiquity, but only what they perceive from the Book of Nature.[13] Stephen Shapin argues that the concept of the Book of Nature placed an emphasis upon direct sensory experience, an idea that became "the root idea of modern *empiricism*."[14] If knowledge is not to be obtained from intellectual traditions and authority, knowledge should be derived from individual perception and reason. Carolyn Merchant argues "sexual politics helped to structure the nature of the empirical method that would produce a new form of knowledge and a new ideology

[12] Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) 68, 69.
[13] Ibid.69. It was believed that there were only two books written by God, the bible and the Book of Nature. As Protestants stressed that individuals should not rely upon the interpretations of priests and popes, a parallel outlook encouraged scientists to rely on the Book of Nature rather than traditional, scientific interpretations and authority. See Shapin 78.
[14] Ibid. 69.

of objectivity seemingly devoid of cultural and political assumptions."[15] Though the mechanists were creating a scientific methodology that was more secular, empirical and seemingly objective, The Book of Nature was not a book devoid of values. As Bacon's sexually violent metaphors demonstrate, ideology, particularly gender politics, were intrinsic to the development of the new empirical science.

II. Magic Science

Although mechanism emphasized a more secular world-view and magic relied on spirituality, both held parallel views upon the state of matter. Similar to mechanism, magical science, also known as hermetic or neo-platonic philosophy, relied upon the idea of matter being moved by force. The magic tradition believed matter had spirit, but it was an active spirit that permeated or suffused passive, inert matter.[16] Though magical science still used active/passive dichotomies to describe matter, it simultaneously also emphasized harmony and union in nature. Keller claims that as a result, it held more egalitarian gender metaphors for "whereas Bacon sought domination, the alchemists asserted the necessity of allegorical, if not actual, cooperation between male and female."[17] Though the hermetic scientists provided more equal metaphors, the magic tradition is nonetheless the science that contrasts most with Cavendish's philosophy.

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[15] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (London: Wildwood House, 1982) 172.

[16] An individual could thus manipulate the natural world by controlling the active spirit within physical bodies. P. M. Harman, *The Scientific Revolution* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1983) 7, 8.

[17] Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) 48.

Cavendish disagrees with the hermetic explanation of immaterial entities being the primal cause of natural phenomenon and attempts to explain and understand nature in material terms. The hermetic concept of active spirit causing motion is disrupted as Cavendish argues that spirits cannot control nature since "natural Matter stands in no need to have some Immaterial or Incorporeal substance to move, rule, guide and govern her, but she is able enough to do it all her self" (*PL* 194). The idea of a self-moving, active and material nature redefines body and nature in such a way that she has become a force that cannot be controlled or governed, whether it is by God, science or immaterial substances.

The hermetic emphasis upon mysticism was problematic for Cavendish not only due to her materialism, but also because she believed science should focus upon the physical, natural world, rather than on spiritual mathematics and numerology. Neo-platonism was influenced by the Jewish Cabala that claimed to reveal the magic secrets of the Old Testament through numbers. Consequently, mathematics was not an impassioned, rational 'hard science', but was a transcendental and magical pursuit. Kearney argues that mathematics "offered the key to a world of unchanging realities, close to, if not identical with, the Divine Mind. The pursuit of mathematics was not a secular activity. It was akin to religious contemplation."[18] Not only were numbers the key to the mind of God, mathematics was understood as an apparatus that could unlock the secrets of nature and the resulting knowledge could induce vast magic, occult powers that would raise the alchemist or astrologer to an almost god-like state.

In contrast to the fundamental tenets of neo-platonic thought, Cavendish argues that mathematics cannot discover divinity or God's mind since it is not

"possible that Divinity can be proved by mathematical Demonstrations; for if Nature be not able to do it, much less is Art" (*PL* 211). If the universe is entirely material, then not only are spirits unable to control passive matter, but the scientist cannot obtain absolute power through their arts and limited corporeal perspective. The concept of mystical mathematics is critiqued in *The Blazing World* when the spirits argue that "infinite cannot be reckoned, nor numbered" (*TBW* 172) and there is no "other mystery in numbers, but what man's fancy makes" (*TBW* 171). If numbers cannot adequately calculate infinity, then mathematics cannot comprehend God's mind. Since conversing with spirits or angels could also be a hermetic practice,[19] Cavendish playfully satirizes this tradition as hermetic spirits argue against the basic tenets of their own science. Though Cavendish may surprisingly appear to contradict her materialism as she continuously refers to the spirits as 'immaterial', in *The Blazing World*, "those spirits were always clothed in some sort or other of material garments" (*TBW* 165) and "cannot leave or quit them" (*TBW* 169). Furthermore, these spirits do not move or govern matter since

> natural material bodies give spirits motion; for we spirits, being incorporeal, have no motion but from our corporeal vehicles, so that we move by the help of our bodies, and not the bodies by the help of us (*TBW* 168)

Rather than spirits governing an inferior, passive body, according to *The Blazing World*, body is the principle that provides spirits with motion. Spirits cannot even

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[18] Kearney 40.

[19] The famous Elizabethan alchemist, John Dee believed that "angelic intercourse was not only a possibility but the ultimate goal of magical activity" (Michael Hunter, *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy: Intellectual Change in Late Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995) 29).

speak or perceive any bodily sense without matter.[20] Thus, Cavendish ironically defines 'immaterial' spirits as entirely corporeal.

The spirits of the Blazing World also critique the belief that hermetic science could find the mysteries of God;

> spirits are as ignorant as mortals in many cases; for no created spirits have a general or absolute knowledge, nor can they know the thoughts of men, much less the mysteries of the great creator (*TBW* 182).

Neither the material spirits, nor any mortal can have a universal knowledge and will not be able to comprehend the divine mind. In *Philosophical Letters,* Cavendish argues that the hermetic scientist's attempts to discover God's secrets represents human arrogance rather than constructive scientific pursuits.

> I am amazed, when I see men so conceited with their own perfections and abilities, (I may rather say, with their imperfections and weaknesses) as to make themselves God's privy Councellors, and his Companions, and partakers of all the sacred Mysteries, Designs, and hidden secrets of the Incomprehensible and Infinite God. O the vain Presumption, Pride, and Ambition of wretched Men! (*PL* 314).

Humanity is vastly ignorant and arrogant in their belief that they can discover the secrets of the divine. Scientists striving for the secrets of God's mind are comparable to the devil and his fall from heaven. Their pride and ambition parallels Satan's aspiration to be like God; "some men will be as presumptuous as the Devil, to enquire into Gods secret actions, although they be sure that they cannot be known by any Creature." (*PL* 349). By linking Satan with scientists who aspire to gain tremendous God-like powers, Cavendish fundamentally questions the morality of the ambitions and objectives of hermetic science.

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[20] "the Empress asked them, whether they could speak without a body, or bodily organs? No, said they; nor could we have any bodily sense" (*TBW* 168, 169).

Cavendish not only finds the idea of the scientist attaining supernatural powers problematic, but she further disagrees with the hermetic emphasis upon secrecy.

> a general good or benefit ought not to be concealed or kept in privy Councels, but to be divulged and publickly made known, that all sorts of People, of what condition, degree, or Nation soever, might partake of the general blessing and bounty of God (*PL* 405).

Alchemists and astrologers did not share their scientific discoveries for their aim was to obtain individual power. Similar to the tenets of the Royal Society and mechanism, Cavendish argues that scientists should divulge their knowledge to others so that it was accessible to everyone to benefit all of humanity.

Since Cavendish routinely emphasizes the diversity, plurality and infinite qualities of nature, opposed to the limitations of human knowledge and ability, she also could not accept the hermetic belief that one medicine could remedy the vast amount of diseases.

> And what would the skill of Physicians be, if one remedy should cure all diseases? Why should they take so much pains in studying the various causes, motions, and tempers of diseases, if one medicine had a general power over all? Nay, for what use should God have created such a number of different simples, Vegetables, and Minerals, if one could do all the business? (*PL* 390).

The natural world is too diverse and remarkable for one medicine to govern the infinite aspects of nature. Furthermore, synthetic medicine would be working against nature since "Chymists torture Nature worst of all; for they extract and distil her beyond substance, nay, into no substance, if they could" (*PL* 491). In attempting to find the philosopher's stone and turning base metal into gold, alchemists transmute natural substances, enacting a God-like position where an external force is controlling nature as she is violently and unnaturally used.

III. Scholastic Science

Although Cavendish disagreed with the hermetic approach to medicine, she enthusiastically agreed with the scholastic, organic medical practices that used natural rather than synthetic remedies, which she understood as working with nature, rather than trying to usurp or possess her powers.[21] Both Cavendish and scholasticism also based their science upon analogies of the body and believed that there was an animistic-like quality in matter. Considering all of these similarities, it would seem that she was embracing the scholastic tradition. Yet, her conception of body and motion vastly differs and challenges Aristotelian definitions of corporality and consequently the gender order that it sustains.

Gender analogies are transgressed as Cavendish disputes the scholastic conception of matter in relation to corruption. The scholastic tradition conceived matter on earth as corruptible, whereas the matter, which composed the heavens or planets, was incorruptible.[22] Since women were associated with matter and nature, and men had a closer likeness to God, women would be located within the negative, corruptible side of the heaven/earth, incorruptible/corruptible binary. Cavendish rejects the notion that anything can be corrupt in nature since all "Matter is Eternal and Incorruptible" (*PL* 460). This statement demonstrates how Cavendish subverts the multiple, reaffirming cultural metaphors that signify and reinforce gender even in perceptions of the planets. As Cavendish collapses the dualism between the heavens

[21] "I am confident [natural remedies], hath rescued more lives, then the Universal Medicine, could Chymists find it out, perchance would do" (*PL* 383).

and earth, she simultaneously challenges the definitions of gender that are related to this dichotomy.

Although Cavendish does relate to many aspects of scholasticism, signifiers of gender are still questioned. She agrees with the Aristotelian notion that everything on earth is in constant flux, yet she argues that this would include all of matter within the whole body of nature, including the heavens. Since all matter is in constant change and motion, she challenges the scholastic tenet that the heavens never change and have perfect motion and the earth has imperfect motion. The heaven/earth distinction is again confounded as all of matter and the universe is composed from the powerful, feminine force of matter, imbued with life and reason.

If nature is such an infinite and continuously active force, the scholastic explanation for motion, that all matter is directed to fulfill its final cause or purpose, is made problematic. Although the theory of final purpose may appear to relate to Cavendish's notion that matter has an animistic, self-motion, this movement towards a final cause does not mean that all matter had life and knowledge. Matter sought its end purpose because it was seeking its natural place in the universe and once it reached its final purpose, it was at rest.[23] Alternatively, Cavendish believed that matter was motion itself; for "Matter, Motion and Figure, are but one thing, individable" (*PL* 10, 11). Furthermore, matter was not searching for its natural place, but rather matter could not exist without place; "all bodies carry their places along with them, for body and place go together and are inseparable" (*PL* 67). An external force cannot move passive bodies from one place to another if matter is always,

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[22] William Cecil Dampier, *A History of Science and its Relations With Philosophy and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961).
[23] Shapin 28, 29.

actively carrying its own place. A body also does not move through various places, for that would suggest that the body is not connected or interacting with the matter that it is immersed within:

> Say a man travels a hundred miles, and so a hundred thousand paces; but yet this man has not been in a hundred thousand places, for he never had any other place but his own, he hath joined and separated himselfe from a hundred thousand, nay millions of parts, but he has left no places behind him (*PL* 102).

Cavendish's labyrinth of body of matter is further complicated and expanded in this definition of place that is not distinct from body.[24] Matter is infinitely interactive and humanity is constantly mixing, becoming part of or physically interacting with the material environment. Within this framework, the distinctions between humanity, body, man, woman and nature are blurred and confused.

IV. Placing Cavendish in the Scientific Revolution

In reading Cavendish in relation to her scientific context, *Philosophical Letters* becomes more than science, but a multi-layered critique and statement of her society's values and world-views. Consequently, by placing her in relation to the Scientific Revolution, her science can be even better understood as building from and critiquing other philosophers in her era and altering the ideology from their theories. For example, the constant strife in Cavendish's Nature, in some respects, parallels the mechanist Hobbes who argued that the natural state of humanity "is a condition of

[24] Perhaps Cavendish's contention that place and body are inseparable was inspired by her time in exile. If body and place are the same principle, then in a sense there can be no physical, and hence political exile. For more information regarding the effect of exile upon Cavendish's literature, see Emma L. E. Rees, "Triply Bound: Genre and the Exilic Self," *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre*

Warre of every man against every man."[25] In a similar manner, Cavendish also understood strife to be an important principle in the natural world; for "there is a war between Natural motions" (*PL* 254). Anna Battigelli argues that Cavendish conceived society as a "Hobbist-atomist system perpetually on the brink of war."[26] However, Cavendish's description does not neatly fit within the Hobbesian system. Cavendish diverges from his politics in her simultaneous emphasis upon natural cooperation since entities in nature "oftentimes give assistance to one side or other, but many times in the conflict, the applied remedies are destroyed, and sometimes they are forced to be Neutrals" (*PL* 254) . Altering the Hobbesian concept of self-preservation, she argues that in nature there is not just war, but both "Natural War, and Peace proceed from Self-preservation" (*TPPO* 6). Unlike Hobbes who conceives human nature to be based upon strife or the hermetic view that nature is peace, Cavendish incorporates both sides of the debate within her theory as she utilizes terms that suggest matter does not simply exist in a state of strife or peace.

Although there is war in nature, there are also relations between parts of matter that are described as sympathy, antipathy, love, hate and aversion. Cavendish is portraying a universe that is more complex than strife. Through using terms that correlate with human emotions, matter remains within an animistic paradigm where matter replicates the intricate, complicated aspects within human relationships and emotions. Considering Cavendish's attacks upon gender hierarchy, it would seem as though she would agree most with the hermetic magic with its metaphors of

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in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish, eds. Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003) 23-39.

[25] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 96.

[26] Anna Battigeli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998) 69.

hermaphroditic unity and gender cooperation in nature. Yet, since matter contains life and free-will, Cavendish argues that there will always be a multiplicity of relations within matter and conflicts or antipathies would inevitably exist. She further counters the hermetic belief that there can be no war in nature.[27] The "actions of Nature, or natural Matter, are continually striving against each other, as being various and different" (*PL* 280). Cavendish is describing a universe where there is natural cooperation and magnetism, without Hobbesian contractual agreements. "I take Sympathy, as also Magnetisme or attractive Power, to be such agreeable Motions in one part or Creature, as do cause a Fancy, love and desire to some other part or Creature" (*PL* 289). Magnetism was important in the magic tradition, where it exemplified the belief that bodies might influence or act upon each other from a distance through the occult powers of sympathy, attraction, or repulsion.[28] Cavendish appropriates the concept of magical antipathies and sympathies to describe the state of Nature. For example, Cavendish wonders "'*what glue or cement holds the parts of hard matter in Stones and Metals together?*'" (*PL* 167). Her answer to this dilemma is that there is "an agreeable union and conjunction in the several parts of Metal or Stone" (*PL* 167). In other words, when matter is sympathetic, without aversion, a union is created. Although she argues that as a whole body in its entirety, nature is peaceful, various parts within her body are always interacting in peaceful or war-like ways; "though the nature of Infinite Matter

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[27] Cavendish specifically argues against the alchemist, Van Helmont, in his claim that "there is no War in nature" (*PL 254*).

[28] Shapin 42. John Donne, who uses many neo-platonic conceits in his poetry, utilizes this hermetic conception to describe his love in terms of magnetic properties. Even though he is physically apart from his lover, their souls combined are like a compass, and they retain a magnetic, magical sympathy; "Thy soule, the fixt foot, makes no show/ To move, but doth, if the' other doe" (John Donne, "A

is simple, and knows of no discord, yet her actions may be cross and opposite: the truth is, Nature could never make such variety, did her actions never oppose each other, but live in a constant Peace and Unity" (*PL* 255). Thus, the hermetic belief of peace and unity in nature cannot exist since the universe would not be so various and diverse if all aspects of matter were sympathetic to one another. The multiplicity of relations within corporeality is the force that create diverse natural phenomenon. Yet, it is also the sympathetic or neutral relations within matter that hold bodies together. It is thus the free-will and animistic qualities of nature that shape matter into forms.

Since natural cooperation within matter is the magnetism that binds matter together, it is not 'art' or cultural practices such as contracts that controls or contains nature.[29] Nature is a force that cannot be controlled by humanity in any manner. The sciences cannot master nature for art "hath found out some things profitable and useful for the life of others, yet she is but a handmaid to Nature, and not her Mistress" (*PL* 362). Art, which encompasses 'male' philosophy and science, is portrayed as not only a woman, but a female servant to Nature, a metaphor that further disrupts and plays with the links between science, reason and power with masculinity.

Though Cavendish redefines nature, her position is still comparable to aspects of Hobbes' thought and the mechanical tradition, particularly in her beliefs regarding the relation between religion and science. The mechanists believed that God was incomprehensible, a tenet firmly embraced by Cavendish; "and though nature may be

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Valediction forbidding mourning," *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, ed. C.A. Patrides (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1985) 98).

known in some parts, yet God being Incomprehensible, his Essence can by no wayes or means be naturally known" (*PL* 140). Both Cavendish and the mechanist tradition also overlap as they advocate a more secular science. Yet the mechanists believed an immaterial God was the force behind the analogy of the universe as machine. Though Cavendish states God is the omnipotent entity within the universe, she is not a mechanist since it is nature, rather than God, that is the principle of motion, knowledge and life within the natural world.

> when I do attribute an Infinite Power, Wisdom, Knowledg, &c. to Nature, I do not understand a Divine, but a Natural Infinite Wisdom and Power, that is, such as properly belongs to Nature, and not a supernatural, as is in god; For Nature having Infinite parts of Infinite degrees, must also have an Infinite natural wisdom to order her natural Infinite parts and actions, and consequently an Infinite natural power to put her wisdom into act; and so of the rest of her attributes, which are all natural (*PL* 8, 9).

Although nature is ultimately created and subservient to God, she is distinct from God and still contains a powerful, active role. Nature is omnipotent through God's command; "Therefore it is probable, God has ordained Nature to work in herself by his Leave, Will, and Free Gift" (*PL* 11). God is enigmatic and unknowable, granting nature the power of creation, motion, life and knowledge within the material world, contrary to the mechanist view of nature being a lifeless and powerless machine. The universe is not a passive instrument within the Cavendish paradigm, but an active, living cognitive organism.

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[29] *The Oxford English Dictionary* states that seventeenth-century definitions of art included "Human skill as an agent, human workmanship. Opposed to nature" (*OED* 657).

V. Mind, Soul and Atoms

Throughout her scientific inquiries, Cavendish uses categories and dualisms that would be familiar and embedded within Western thought. However, she questions and subverts such conceptions by placing them in a different context. For example, Cavendish uses a mind/body dichotomy in her description of matter. Yet, she creates these distinctions in order to question the values they support. In *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, she argues that that there is one aspect in animate matter that contains reason and another that contains sense and life; "since the Animate matter is of two Degrees, Sensitive and Rational, I call the Sensitive the Life, and the Rational the Soul" (*TPPO sig. D4r*). This initially appears like Aristotelian thought where rational substances control and are superior to grosser subjects that are devoid of reason.[30] Yet these forms of matter are completely intermixed with each other and body, so that everything in existence has reason, body, motion and life, thus the mind/body distinction is not only blended, but placed within a different value system since "all degrees of Only and Infinite matter are Intermixed" (*PAPO* 4). Life, power and knowledge are brought into concepts such as nature, matter and body that were within the feminine side of the male/female metaphors. The concept of mind distinct from matter is now placed in an animistic universe where all of nature has reason.

> there is life and knowledg in all parts of nature, by reason in all parts of nature there is a commixture of animate and inanimate matter: and this Life and Knowledg is sense and reason, or sensitive and rational corporeal motions, which are all one thing with animate matter without any distinction or

[30] Jay Stevenson, "The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36.3 (1996): 537.

> abstraction, and can no more quit matter, then matter can quit motion (*PL* 99, 100).

Mind is not superior over matter and femininity cannot be defined as irrational, as both are thoroughly intermixed as one living, knowing entity.

Cavendish's universe is a conglomeration of reason, body and knowledge. The mind is an entity that functions like a physical body, "the minde feeds as greatly on thoughts, as a hungry stomacke doth upon meat" confusing the conventional mind/body categories (*TPPO* 110). If mind and matter are conceived as the same, then signifiers of masculinity and femininity are confused, collapsing the gender hierarchy that places men within an ideologically superior position.

In contrast to the Cartesian mind/body dualism, she claims that the mind and body are both material and thus, inseparable. Humans cannot have immaterial knowledge since "the Natural Mind is not less material then the body" (*PL* 149). Nature as a whole body united has knowledge of the entire material world since her creatures are only pieces that together compose her body and they can only obtain fragments and pieces of this wisdom. Consequently, all creatures in nature are simultaneously wise and ignorant.

> for if there were not ignorance through the division of Parts, every man and other creatures would know alike; and there is no better proof, that matter, or any particular creature in nature is not governed by a created Immaterial Spirit, then that knowledg is in parts (*PL* 178).

No aspect of nature can either comprehend or be entirely ignorant of the whole infinite body of which they are a small part. Since all perspectives and knowledge are to some degree valid and true, none can claim perfection: "no particular Creature in Nature can have any exact or perfect knowledg of Natural things, and therefore opinions cannot be infallible truths" (*PL* 246). Perhaps this is why Cavendish

characteristically depicts various and contradictory opinions and perspectives upon one subject. Since knowledge is distributed or divided amongst body and matter, no single entity has a privileged perspective for "there is no part of Nature that hath not life and knowledg" (*PL* 98, 99). Cavendish conceives an animistic universe where not only humanity, but every aspect of the material world is wisdom. Human reason is only one aspect within a vast, infinite body.

Human knowledge appears insignificant within this wider view of the universe. Nature is goddess-like, yet is corporeal and too vast and infinite to be an anthropomorphic character. Her knowledge and power is divided and distributed throughout the material world.

> for what man knows, whether Fish do not Know more of the nature of Water, and ebbing and flowing, and the saltness of the Sea? or whether Birds do not know more of the nature and degrees of Air, or the cause of Tempests? [. . .] For, though they have not the speech of Man, yet thence doth not follow, that they have no Intelligence at all. But the Ignorance of Men concerning other Creatures is the cause of despising other Creatures, imagining themselves as petty Gods in Nature (*PL* 41, 42)

Many forms of knowledge within Nature may be incomprehensible or imperceptible to humanity since knowledge is limited by material, sensory perceptions. Other forms of knowledge may possibly exist beyond our abilities "for other Creatures may know and perceive as much as Animals, although they have not the same Sensitive Organs, nor the same [manner] or way of Perception" (*PL* 59). It is significant that Cavendish criticizes the belief that animals do not have speech, and hence have no intelligence. Scientists such as Descartes and Hobbes understood speech as a defining feature of what distinguished humanity from other creatures.[31] This attitude

[31] Holly Faith Nelson, "'Worms in the Dull Earth of Ignorance': Zoosemiotics and Sexual Politics in the Works of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle," *English Language Notes*, 39.4 (2002): 12-24.

was not confined to the sciences and can also be perceived in seventeenth-century literature and religion.[32] Erica Fudge argues that the "making of the boundary which separates the human from the beast is important" particularly since "it is an issue in many areas of culture which are central to our understanding of the early modern period."[33] Animals represent and define human power.[34] Yet, through challenging the human/beast binary, sexual politics are also questioned. There was an association between beast and woman in early modern anti-feminist rhetoric.[35] Holly Faith Nelson argues that in Cavendish's natural philosophy, she shifts meanings of animals to challenge gender.

> As woman and beast intersect as negative terms in the dominant patriarchal discourse, Cavendish invests positive value in both the female and the non-human to subvert the binary that divests women and animals of symbolic power. Cavendish makes a clear attempt to reject the negative value assigned to female and beast when she inverts the definition of "man" and "beast" to the benefit of the category "woman"[36]

Cavendish recognized that in order to redefine the category of woman, the symbolic domain had to be re-conceptualized so that all signifiers of 'others' were shifted and hence could not be used as negative measures to define the feminine. It is consequently significant that in *The Blazing World*, the creatures who are hybrid humans with animals or insects can not only reason, but they can speak. Yet it is not just understandings of animals and insects that are challenged within the Cavendish paradigm. Catherine Gallagher argues that because Cavendish in *The Blazing World*

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[32] Nelson argues that both Donne and Jonson in literature, and Calvin in religion, employed similar ideas regarding speech to define human supremacy. Ibid. 13-15.
[33] Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002) 1.
[34] Ibid. 4.
[35] Nelson 18.
[36] Ibid. 19.

> assumes that each unit of matter englobes a self-sufficient and radically distinct consciousness, she is able to imagine that there is no privileged perspective of universal knowledge, such as that which might earlier have been attributed to the topmost position on the great chain of being, the position occupied by the male human being.[37]

There can be no human supremacy or natural gender hierarchy in matter within this view of the universe since all creatures have their own specific knowledge and perspective. Consequently, the male scientist cannot dominate or master a female nature if human knowledge is a fraction within an infinitely complex body.

As Cavendish expands and complicates the natural world into a labyrinth of animistic, conscious, living matter, she complains that science often "takes a part for the whole, to wit, this visible World for all Nature, when as this World is onely a part of Nature, or Natural Matter, and there may be more and Infinite worlds besides" (*PL* 460). If there are multiple worlds within the mass of Nature, how can a tiny fragment of an infinite, complex mass, understand, control or dominate the whole? If the body of nature is immeasurable then there could be more worlds than an individual could comprehend. Cavendish's theory of multiple worlds can be better understood in context of atoms. She conceives even particles as small as atoms as having their own life and knowledge. If every aspect of nature, whether it is as small as an atom, has life and reason, then there could be infinite worlds that are imperceptible to our senses. For example, there could be "A World in an Eare-Ring" as described in her atomic poetry (*PF* 45). This theory of matter expands beyond human experience and comprehension since there are worlds within worlds that are too small, large or enigmatic for human comprehension and our senses are too limited to be able to

[37] Catherine Gallagher, "Embracing the Absolute: Margaret Cavendish and the Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England," *Early Women Writers: 1600-1720*, ed. Anita Pacheco (London: Longman, 1998) 143.

perceive or understand the "Infinite variety of Worlds" (*TPPO* 107). Since even thoughts are material, people can create worlds with their thoughts as is done by the characters in *The Blazing World*.[38]

VI. Science and Power

As Cavendish critiques and absorbs aspects from various sciences and philosophers, she playfully revises scientific metaphors and ideas that maintain sexual hierarchy. Since nature had such powerful cultural associations with woman, Cavendish attacks her contemporaries and their assumption that nature is a body, void of reason.

> some of our modern Philosophers think they do God good service, when they endeavour to prove Nature, as Gods good Servant, to be stupid, ignorant, foolish and mad, or any thing rather then wise, and yet they believe themselves wise, as if they were no part of Nature; but I cannot imagine any reason why they should rail on her, except Nature had not given them as great a share or portion, as she hath given to others; for children in this case do often rail at their Parents, for leaving their Brothers and Sisters more then themselves (*PL* 162, 163).

Placing the relationship between science and Nature metaphorically into a system of inheritance, Cavendish indicates that scientists are seeking power and wealth from their pursuit of knowledge. This passage also suggests that by railing at Nature and calling her 'stupid' or 'mad', they utter abusive language to their mother, an action that in early modern society would be both disobedient and disorderly to family and state.[39] Diane Willen argues that in "economic, political and religious terms the early

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[38] Cavendish argues "Thoughts, Ideas, Conceptions" are "all Material" (*PL* 12). Placed in context of *The Blazing World*, this indicates that all people are capable of creating physical worlds; "can any mortal be a creator? Yes, answered the spirits" (*TBW* 185).

[39] *OED* 126.

modern family was integral to society" and many "saw the patriarchal household as an analogy for the hierarchical state."[40] Families were crucial for early modern conceptions of governmental order and with the good management of families, the well-being of the commonwealth depended.[41] From this perspective, as scientists rail at their mother, they are analogous to rebellious children, disrupting the family and reversing the natural order. This passage also suggests that humanity is not God's favorite, but their vanity is akin to little children who whine and shout abuse for want of more attention and power. The scientist's desire for power from 'reason' is ironically derived from jealousy and ambition. Cavendish places humanity into a humbling position where only nature as a whole body united has knowledge of the entire material world. If humanity is only a part within Nature's body, then "there can never be in one particular creature a perfect knowledg of all things in Nature" (*PL* 407). As a result, Cavendish conceives human knowledge as fragmented and limited.

Since humanity is merely a small fraction of the body of nature, their knowledge and perspective cannot transcend their limited position with the natural world. Male reason and knowledge are not distinct from body, matter and femaleness, but are limited creatures within her. This strikingly contrasts not only with many scientific discourses, but also with the poetic language of the period.[42] Jonathan Sawday argues that the image of a "triumph of a strident masculinity over a

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[40] Diane Willen, "Religion and the Construction of the Feminine," *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. Anita Pacheco (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002) 25.

[41] See Keith V. Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects," *Past and Present,* 13 (1958): 42. Though his article addresses radical sects in the civil war, his article is founded upon meanings of family in the early modern period.

submissive and cowed feminine Nature within the discourses of science was entirely in accord with the poetical-political language of the moment."[43] Poets such as John Donne employed the language of ownership, colonization and discovery of the natural world to describe a female lover.[44]

> O my America! my new-found-land,
> My kingdome, safeliest when with one man man'd,
> My Myne of precious stones: My Emperie,
> How blest am I in this disovering thee![45]

Evoking a sinister combination of colonization and sensuality, the woman is the empire to be controlled, depicting an association between woman, body and nature as entities to be owned and dominated.

However, in the Cavendish universe, nature and matter cannot be governed or possessed since it is the force that creates humanity itself for "the cause of every particular material Creature is the onely and Infinite Matter" (*PL* 10, 11). Matter itself is one united mass or body that is continuously moving in infinite ways to create a diverse and boundless universe.

> for though Matter is one and the same in its Nature, and never changes, yet the motions are various, which motions are the several actions of one and the same Natural Matter; and this is the cause of so many several Creatures; for self-moving matter by its self-moving power can act several ways, modes or manners; and had not natural matter a self-acting power, there could not be any variety in Nature; for Nature knows of no rest, there being no such thing as rest in Nature; but she is in a perpetual motion, I mean self-motion (*PL* 163, 164).

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[42] Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Boy in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995) 245. Sawday further argues that, to a certain degree, this was a reaction to the perceived 'effeminacy' of royalist discourse. See Ibid. 238

[43] Ibid. 237.

[44] For a discussion regarding the relation between the representations of the female corpus in both Donne and anatomy, see Ibid. 26-28.

[45] John Donne, "Elegie XIX. To his Mistress Going to Bed," John Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, ed. C.A. Patrides (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1985) 184.

Thus, it is Nature's activeness and will that cause and produce the universe. In terms of gender, this signifies that femaleness and body are the active powers and will that create the world.

VII. The Royal Society and *The Blazing World*

Though Cavendish dismantles gender dichotomies by envisioning nature as an infinitely complicated, powerful female body, Sawday explains that "'Royal Science' developed a stridently aggressive language of appropriation and domination from which science, particularly biological science, has never recovered."[46] The gender politics intrinsic within the development of the new science, which later evolved into modern scientific method, is reflected in the *History of the Royal Society*, written by Thomas Spratt, only ten years after the society was established. The language of sex difference is the initial point of departure for the text as the preface begins by reversing traditional gendered analogies. "Philosophia" is resolutely given a metaphorical sex-change; "Philosophy, I say, and call it, He, For whatsoe're the Painters Fancy by, It a Male Virtue seems to me."[47] Sprat argues that the Royal Society needs to stop the use of 'feminine' poetic tropes since poetic language hinders scientific progress from discovering an objective truth or

[46] Sawday 245.

[47] Thomas Sprat, *History of the Royal Society*, eds. Jackson I. Cope and Harold Whitmore Jones (St. Louise: Washington University Studies, 1959) sig. B1r. For a more in depth discussion of the gendering of the language of science, see Sawday, particularly the chapter "Royal Science" 230-270.

"perfection in true knowledge."[48] Femaleness is consequently opposed and even hinders scientific reason that will lead to an objective epistemology.

Rather than perfection in knowledge, Keller argues that for Cavendish, scientific objectivity is "social constructions that are endorsed as much because they advance the needs of their adherents as because they are deemed to be scientifically effective or true."[49] Cavendish often satirizes scientific claims of value-neutrality and this is particularly evident in *The Blazing World.* For example, the concept of an aggressive, masculine science mastering truth, in opposition to female fancy, is parodied in the preface of *The Blazing World* where the first section of the book is described surprisingly as "romancical" (*TBW* 124); surprising since this is the part which depicts a scientific community much like the Royal Society.[50] By describing their work as a romance or fictional fantasy, Cavendish counters claims that the Royal Society represents objective, masculine reason mastering the world. However, the inability to discern absolute truth is not limited to the Royal Society or any other science. Cavendish remains consistent to her project of dismantling claims to absolute knowledge as she even playfully satirizes herself. Sarah Hutton demonstrates that "it is by no means always that a 'Cavendish opinion' wins the debate."[51] Though she sets up a truth/fiction dichotomy in her preface, claiming that

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[48] Sprat 15. The importance of gender for conceptualizing and defining the Royal Society is reflected in its membership. Though the Royal Society allowed people of various religious, class and ethnic backgrounds to be members, women were still excluded. Margery Purver, *The Royal Society: Concept and Creation* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967) 98, 151.

[49] See Keller, "Producing Petty Gods: Margaret Cavendish's Critique of Experimental Science," 451.

[50] For a more in depth discussion of how the scientific communities resemble the royal society, see Sarah Hutton, "Science and Satire: The Lucianic Voice of Margaret Cavendish's *Description of a New World Called the Blazing World*," *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish*, eds. Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003) 161-178.

[51] For example "the fish-men's explanation of tides and currents in the sea is not the one propounded in *Observations"* (Ibid. 170).

The Blazing World is entirely separate from the realm of truth and science, she nonetheless publishes it as an appendix to her philosophical work, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*. Ironically, both texts explore the same scientific theories, but from within seemingly contradicting mediums, demonstrating the fantasy and science are not absolute dichotomies.

In contrast to the "romancical" part, the second section of *The Blazing World* is referred to as "philosophical" even though no science is actually discussed, only conquest and war, demonstrating her contention that science is more concerned with power and ambition than objectivity (*TBW* 124). Even the spirits, which resemble the hermetic belief in conversing with angels or spirits, are part of the Empress's larger project of maintaining absolute power, they serve as spies and "gave her intelligence of all such things as she desired to know" (*TBW* 203).[52] Indeed their intelligence instigate war and colonization. Though the magical sciences emphasized harmony in the universe, John Dee the famous Elizabethan alchemist, published a four-volume work in which he elaborated his imperial case. The "scientific" part of *The Blazing World* becomes an increasingly appropriate title in context of Dee whose frontispiece to the volume on *The Art of Navigation* (1577) "carried an image of the "Imperiall Ship" of Christendom, carrying the Empress Elizabeth on a mission to restore her empire through sea power," uncannily resembling the Empress's naval war in *The Blazing World*.[53] Rather than scientific knowledge being objective truth,

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[52] For a more in depth discussion of how Cavendish satires hermetic philosophy in *The Blazing World*, see Sarah Hutton, "Margaret Cavendish and Henry More," *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish*, ed. Stephen Clucas (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003) 185-198.

[53] Robert Poole, "John Dee and the English Calendar: Science, Religion and Empire," *Electronic Seminars in History Institute of Historical Research*, 1996, 3 November 2004. http://www.history.ac.uk/projects/elec/sem2.html#top. This image of "blazing martial success in naval conflict" may have also been inspired by the Anglo-Dutch wars (Ros Ballaster, "Restoring the

The Blazing World demonstrates science as having a definitive political agenda as it serves as a conduit for political power, conquest, manipulation and imperialism.

VIII. Soul and Body

Though Cavendish's understanding of knowledge within both her science and fiction disrupts assumptions regarding reason and objectivity, her theories of the soul in relation to matter also question the belief that she advocates hierarchy. All of Nature, including atoms, are not only active, powerful and imbued with reason, but also contain equal soul.

> there is not any Creature or part of nature without this Life and Soul; and that not onely Animals, but also Vegetables, Minerals and Elements, and what more is in Nature, are endued with this Life and Soul, Sense and Reason: and because this Life and Soul is a corporeal Substance, it is both dividable and composable (*PL* sig. B2v).

Although materialism and animism may appear paradoxical, Cavendish defines the soul as corporeal, a presence within all matter, that is not supernatural or exclusive to humanity; "though there is but one Soul in infinite Nature, yet that soul being dividable into parts, every part is a soul in every single creature, were the parts no bigger in quantity then an atome" (*PL* 433).[54] There is no true self or soul, but infinite, dizzying amounts of living, knowing souls within one organism. There is no

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Renaissance: Margaret Cavendish and Katherine Philips," *Renaissance Configurations: Voices/Bodies/Spaces, 1580-1690*, ed. Gordon McMullan (MacMillan Press Ltd., 1998) 238-241).

[54] Though in some respects, the term vitalism, an idea used by many hermetic philosophers, would be more historically appropriate than animism, I refrain from using the term since vitalism does not quite correlate with Cavendish's thought. Though it indicates a unity of matter and spirit as a self-moving entity, the spirit was considered superior. For example, Paracelsus who originally put forward the theory, believed, that material objects "were merely gross manifestations of the subtle soul" (See Merchant 117, 118).

death within this paradigm, only changes within matter.[55] Although a person or creature may die, the matter of which they were composed will continue to be endued with life, soul and motion. In a similar manner, matter is never created, but only moves and changes since "one Creature is produced by another, by the dividing and uniting, joyning and disjoyning of the several parts of Matter, and not by substanceless Motion out of new Matter" (*PL* 431). Matter exists as a plurality of states as the various forms compose, dissolve and continuously change. Conceiving body and soul as the same principle, rather than polarized opposites, contrasts with Aristotle who argues not only that "Soul is better than body," but that "the physical part, the body, comes from the female, and the Soul from the male."[56] David Booy explains that

> the traditional hierarchies associated with body, mind and soul, and their functioning, provided metaphors to confirm the superior status of men. For example, it was commonplace to claim that the man was the head, the woman the body, and that he should therefore control her. Related to this was the association of men with reason and women with passion.[57]

In redefining the concept of both soul and reason, blending them with materiality, the association of masculinity with divinity blends into the cultural definitions of femininity and its links with nature and body.

As matter is understood as one active, living mass, where the various parts continuously transform, create and dissolve one another, Cavendish emphasizes a connection between all matter. "I cannot conceive how any thing can be by it self in Nature, by reason there is nothing alone and single in Nature, but all are inseparable parts of one body" (*PL* 248) and consequently, "there is no part that can subsist

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[55] "what is commonly named death, is but an alteration or change of corporeal motions" (*PL* 411).
[56] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A.L. Peck (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1943) 131, 185.

singly by it self, without dependance upon each other" (*PL* 117). This emphasis upon the connection between matter again exemplifies Cavendish's characteristic resistance to dualism and hierarchy. Cavendish does not just deconstruct hierarchy between man and woman, but questions hierarchy and binaries of all kinds. All of matter is part of, connecting, and dissolving into the same body and thus humanity or any other entity is not distinct or superior to any other part in nature.

IX. The Imperfect Male and the Body Grotesque

While examining various aspects of early modern culture which contributed to understandings of the self, Booy claims that the "body was central to discussions of the differences and similarities between the sexes, and physiological theories were the foundation for thinking about gender."[58] In contemporary theory, Butler argues that biological sex is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but an effect of power since it "is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce-demarcate, circulate, differentiate-the bodies it controls," that it creates the norms by which a body can be understood in the "domain of cultural intelligibility."[59] In this context, body has its own history. Sawday conceptualizes the body as seeming to "possess its own specific forms of history which are ordered by a network of social and religious codes".[60] As a consequence, early modern

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[57] Booy 225.
[58] Ibid. 225.
[59] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 1-2.
[60] Sawday 7.

bodies induced forms of self-experience that are no longer possible for us.[61] Since bodies may feel 'natural', it may be difficult to understand them as normative, historical constructs. Yet, theorists have been exploring the gendered constructs even implicit within contemporary, 'factual' scientific discourse: constructs which inevitably effect how an individual understands, interprets and experiences their body and the world around them.[62] When exploring a different era's conception of body (outside the parameters of our own cultural intelligibility), the relation between power and sex becomes strikingly apparent.

The conflation between power, gender and body is particularly evident in early modern understandings of reproduction. In discussing generation, Cavendish complains that Aristotle is "the Idol of the Schools, for his doctrine is generally embraced with such reverence, as if Truth it self had declared it" (*OUEP* 32). Aristotle's conception of physiology was pervasive, and in context of the history of the body, it powerfully demonstrates how deeply sexual politics shaped perceptions of corporeality. The male "is something *better* and more divine in that it is the principle of movement for generated things, while the female serves as their matter."[63] According to this logic, the woman does not actively participate in reproduction since the womb was merely the place where matter is worked on by form and had no actual active role in generation.

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[61] Laura Gowing argues that understandings of the body derived from Galenic humoral theory created a sense of self which would be impossible for contemporary people to experience. See Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 13.

[62] For example something as seemingly straightforward or factual as scientific descriptions of egg and sperm have been intrinsically bound with gender stereotypes of male aggression and female passivity that reflect ideology more than observed behavior. See Emily Martin, "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles," *Feminism and Science*, eds. Evelyn Fox Keller and Helen E. Longino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 103-117.

> The female always provides the material, the male provides that which fashions the material into shape; this, in our view, is the specific characteristic of each of the sexes: that is what it means to be male or to be female[64]

Since women were understood as passive receptacles for active male generative force, these reproductive roles defined their entire nature; men were active and women passive and within this framework these concepts could be substituted for moving and moved.[65] It is thus significant that Cavendish theorizes female matter that constitutes the active principle of movement. Dominant understandings of bodies are contradicted as she argues that it is motion and body which cause reproduction since "in generation every producer doth transfer both Matter and Motion, that is, Corporeal Motion into the produced; and if there be more producers then one, they all do contribute to the produced" (*PL* 420, 421). Both parents (or producers) contribute matter and motion, disrupting Aristotelian hierarchies based upon matter and reproduction.[66]

Cavendish also downplays the importance of the womb in relation to reproduction, but she does not argue that it is not significant or that women's roles in generation is merely passive

> As there is not any body without place, nor any place without body, so the womb is not the place of the body generated, neither before nor after its generation, no more then a man can be said to be in a room when he is not there, but every body carries its place along with it (*PL* 398)

Redefining the sexual politics that found Aristotelian physiology, Cavendish suggests that if place and body are inseparable, the womb loses its significance as a place of

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[63] Aristotle 133.
[64] Ibid. 185.
[65] "we may generalize this still further by substituting 'moving' and 'moved' for 'active' and 'passive'" (Ibid. 113).

reproduction, de-emphasizing the powerful association between womb, matter and irrationality. All of matter in its entirety, regardless of sex, has the power to create. Early modern thought often understood the womb as unclean, unstable, suspect and foul and pregnancy as a sort of disease.[67] "The female body *was* held to be monstrous and grotesque, a region of erotic desire governed by the quasi-autonomous uterus."[68] Sawday argues that the uterus was particularly a thing of fascination for anatomists because it "was not only the principle of life, but the source of all loss of rational (male) intellect."[69]

As Cavendish defines place as inseparable from body, Renaissance ideologies of wombs and bodies are redefined. Butler states that the aim of her theory of the body is to create "a radical re-signification of the symbolic domain, deviating the citational chain toward a more possible future to expand the very meaning of what counts as a valued and valuable body in the world."[70] Though Cavendish's theorized in the seventeenth-century, her science leads towards a similar aim. Bodies or body parts that are defined as inferior or grotesque in early modern physiology are placed within a different signifying chain, radically questioning and altering what is a valued or non- valued corpus. If place and body are the same principle and every aspect of matter is alive and rational, always moving and infinitely creating new worlds, the universe is also a place resembling the function of a womb. The womb loses its metaphoric significance as a frightening locale that is in opposition to male reason.

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[66] For a discussion of how Cavendish further disrupts Aristotelian constructions of gender in her dramatic work, see Andrew Hiscock, "'Here's no design, no plot, nor any ground': the drama of Margaret Cavendish and the disorderly woman," *Women's Writing* 4.3 (1997): 401-420.
[67] Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) 174, 184.
[68] Sawday 221.
[69] Ibid. 222.

Like a pregnant woman, corporeality itself is the site that creates, nourishes and generates life. Matter and every aspect of the natural world is the womb of the universe.

The female body was not simply considered grotesque because of the womb, but also because of fundamental biological perceptions that defined female bodies. Women were understood as imperfect men. Aristotle argues that "the female is as it were a deformed male."[71] The male body was the perfect form and the female body was a defect from this generic type and were thus defined as a kind of monster in Nature.[72] In a sense there was no female body in this logic since females were basically males that went wrong. A female was created when a man lacked enough vital heat to produce another male. Consequently, a woman was understood as being an "infertile male" because they lacked heat and thus *dynamus* or soul to generate a new life.[73] Like his cosmology, which indicates that feminized matter is corrupt and inferior to the perfect heavens, female menstrual blood is also a corrupt form of perfect male bodily fluids. Semen was the principle of new life since it contained vital heat and soul necessary for reproduction; menstrual blood was a form of male semen "though in an impure condition."[74] Thus, the premise of Aristotle's biological understanding of gender inequality is based upon temperature. Women are inferior or are not able to become men because they lack vital heat; "That which by nature has a smaller share of heat is weaker; and the female answers to this description."[75]

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[70] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* 22.
[71] Aristotle 175.
[72] "Nature has in a way strayed from the generic type. The first beginning of this deviation is when a female is formed instead of a male, though this indeed is a necessity required by Nature" (Ibid. 401).
[73] Ibid. 103.
[74] Ibid. 175.
[75] Ibid. 93-95.

X. The Politics of Heat

Heat was a principle component for understanding sex difference within the other pervasive early modern theoretical framework for imagining the body. Models of the body based upon Galen's theory of humors were also widely used in both universities and popular culture alike.[76] The medical discoveries of the seventeenth-century did not immediately filter through into popular print, or alter prevailing ideas of gender and body.[77] Thus, in humoral theory, bodies were composed of the four humors or fluids, blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile and these humors determined sex and temperament.[78] Unlike nineteenth-century conceptions of sexual difference that relied upon notion of the incommensurability of the sexes, male and female bodies were understood to be fundamentally the same.[79] Thomas Laqueur argues that in this model of the body, two genders correspond to 'one-sex'.[80] Reproductive organs were conceived as being inverted versions of each other.[81]

> with every one of men's reproductive organs mirrored in a similar female one with complementary functions. For all their differences, male and female bodies were fundamentally similar and structurally equivalent. Sex was a matter of degrees, not absolutes, dependent on the balance of humours.[82]

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[76] Though Galen and Aristotle provided conceptions of the body that were highly influential and prevalent throughout early modern society, Gowing has demonstrated that in popular medical books and discourse there were alternative and contradictory models. See Gowing 19.

[77] Ibid. 17. Sawday argues that even the understandings of the body induced by the work of Harvey and his followers, "structured knowledge in a way which was not only implicitly gendered (as it had always been), but explicitly reliant on a conscious deployment of a gendered language of discovery" (See Sawday 231). However, Booy argues that some physicians were beginning to maintain that women were equally perfect in their sex as men. Booy 225.

[78] Gowing 22.

[79] Ibid. 18, 19.

[80] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1990) 25.

[81] Ibid. 35.

[82] Gowing 18.

For example, the penis becomes an inverted cervix and the scrotum, the womb. From this perspective, "there is no female and no sharp boundary between the sexes."[83] Consequently, Galen's theory was less misogynistic than Aristotelian thought, particularly since it allows women's participation in reproduction. However, humoral theory "had traditionally been used to encode and support a hierarchical view of the sexes, and to explain and justify gender differences."[84] The language of humoralism establishes internal hierarchies of fluids within the body, which is fully correlated with external gender politics.[85] As in Aristotle, such hierarchies were caused by temperatures and humoral theory fundamentally relied upon the innate goodness of heat.[86] Women's bodies, not surprisingly, were understood as an imperfect version of the hot, dry, well-regulated male body.[87]

Temperature was vital for understanding not only physiology, but also personality and the self. Though a wide spectrum of characteristics could potentially be in both sexes, men were believed to be by nature more inclined to heat and dryness and this indicated that their bodies would naturally be firm and strong, making possible a range of characteristics such as courage, intelligence, magnanimity, hotheadness and aggression which were deemed 'masculine'.[88] In contrast, women were consequently understood to be colder and more liquid than men. According to the politics of heat, this indicated that women were less intelligent, courageous and constant than men and were also weaker and more

[83] Laqueur 35.
[84] Booy 225.
[85] Paster 19.
[86] Ibid. 71.
[87] Ibid. 82.
[88] Booy 225, 226.

emotional.[89] Such gendered understandings of the self and body had very real consequences for cultural politics since women's physiology rendered them "unsuited to the rigors of the outside world, and their putative mental and emotional shortcomings justified their being excluded from the public domain."[90] Similar to Aristotelian hierarchies of bodily fluids, humoral theory held that female blood was not as warm or pure as male blood and like women's moral state, their bodies were more inclined to corruption. By "virtue of its colder temperature their blood tended to be slower moving, clammier, grosser. Its natural attributes were also the attributes that, when magnified or increased, described disease."[91] Their excessive and impure blood in particular marked women as polluted and inferior.[92] Paster argues that

> I take these humoral axioms to imply that the blood of women as a category in nature was readily classifiable as superfluity or waste and that on the whole this was true no matter how soluble or evenly tempered a given individual woman might be[93]

This belief, along with women's ability to menstruate, lactate and the early modern stereotype of women's incontinent nature, contributed to the notion that women's bodies were incomplete, 'leaky vessels'.[94] Paster argues that in this model "woman is naturally grotesque - which is to say, open, permeable, effluent, leaky. Man is

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[89] Ibid. 225.

[90] Ibid. 226. Booy argues that though physiology was deeply patriarchal, 'female' characteristics were not always entirely negative; coldness and moisture were seen to induce a few admirable characteristics such as kindness, vivid imaginations, retentive memories and gentleness. Ibid. 225.

[91] Paster 79.

[92] Booy 226.

[93] Paster 79. The language of humoral theory profoundly affected how people understood their own self. Even a pregnant woman's physical health was often understood as being derived from the sex of the fetus; "They which be with child of a boy are more quicke and nimble in all their actions, and be in better health of body, without being subject to many infirmities which commonly happen to women with child of a wench" whereas a girl will cause a woman to be "wayward, fretfull and sad" (Jaques Guillemeau, *Child-birth, or The Happy Deliverie of Women* (1612) 10, qtd. in Paster 184). This notion would have been justified by the belief that coldness and moisture could cause melancholy. See Paster 79.

[94] Ibid., see chapter 1 "Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy" 23-63.

naturally whole, closed, opaque, self- contained."[95] Sawday argues that there was a tendency "to stress the endless divisibility of the female body. The perfect body, of course, was male - entire, whole, complete - a harmonious union of form and matter."[96] Paralleling science, man's body was also more perfect in religion since "god created the man in his image."[97] Yet, in Cavendish's paradigm, all aspects of the material world are fractured and incomplete. The male body is as incomplete and imperfect as any other part of matter. This also radically and subversively indicates that the only form in matter that is a whole, entire, harmonious union, is the perfect *female* body of Nature.

Since in both Aristotelian and Galenic models, sexual difference is induced by temperature, the female's lack of heat is the fundamental principle that causes her to be passive, incomplete and ultimately inferior. In this context, Cavendish's understanding of temperature in both her science and literature resists these deeply patriarchal constructions of the female corpus. For example, Geraldine Wagner explains that regarding the Empress in *The Blazing World* "there is a certain amount of agentic power intimated by the "light of her beauty" and "heat of her youth," both of which help her to survive the extremity of cold."[98] Though Aristotle argued that women were passive and that "Nature does not assign defensive weapons to any female creature," the Empress remarkably survives and defends herself against freezing arctic temperature due to her own heat and light.[99] Cavendish blatantly

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[95] Ibid. 92.
[96] Sawday 217.
[97] Genesis I. 27, *The Bible, that is, the Holy Scriptures conteined in the Old and New Testament* (London: Robert Barker, 1606) sig. A1v.
[98] Geraldine Wagner, "Romancing Multiplicity: Female Subjectivity and the Body Divisible in Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*," *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 9.1 (2003): 9.16.
[99] Aristotle 335.

contradicts both Aristotelian and Galen models of bodies, gender and heat, as the males that have kidnapped the Empress, fail to produce comparable amounts of heat as a woman and "were all frozen to death" (*TBW* 126).[100] Yet, Cavendish is not just reversing the heat/male and cold/female dichotomies, she reconceptualizes the meaning and function of temperature.

> neither is death more cold then hot, nor life more hot then cold; for we see that Frost is as active and strong as burning heat; and Water, Air, and Earth, are as full of life, as Fire; and Vegetables, Minerals, and Elements, have life as well as Animals: But we, feeling a Man's flesh cold when he is dissolving from an Animal, think death is cold; and seeing he was hot before the same alteration, say Life is hot (*PL* 386, 387).

Cavendish dismantles the gender hierarchy implicit within the meanings of hot and cold as she perceives cold as being a force as active, burning and strong as heat. Though Aristotelian heat is equivalent to life, activity and soul, for Cavendish life does not equate to temperature. If everything has life then death is not hot or cold; the concept of vital heat is merely an imperfection of our limited corporeal perceptions.

In contrast to the axioms of humoral theory which argued women's colder bodies made women more prone to melancholy and men more prone to anger,[101] Cavendish argues that temperature, fluids, and moods are not intrinsically connected.[102] Not only is the distinction between cold and heat challenged, but there are "Infinite degrees of softness, hardness, thickness, thinness, heat and cold" and also "Infinite degrees of Strength, Knowledg, Power" (*PL* 6). Hot and cold are not

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[100] This passage is highly subversive on another level as well since the light of her beauty would conventionally transcend the male Petrarchan lover to God. Instead, the woman is not a passive object of the male gaze; her own beauty actively transcends herself to another world.

[101] Gowing 2.

[102] "it is not divers distempers, as your author sayes, that cause different Dreams or Cold, or Heat" (*PL* 29).

simple categories, but are infinites. They both can be infinite in their severity, strength or weakness. For example, she argues that during the summer, the sun, specifically described as male, has a burning heat, where he appears "an absolute Conqueror of all Exterior Cold motions." However, the cold is an equally powerful principle for in the autumn "Cold elements become more Strong by Degrees, and in the Winter season they are in full Power" (*PP0* 245). As summer and winter shift and replace each other with the seasons, hot and cold 'motions' are represented as equally significant, powerful and prevailing forces. The use of the term 'infinite' to describe both heat and cold indicate that they are, in a sense, non-definable concepts. Not that an individual cannot perceive the temperature of an object, but that the broader categories of hot and cold exceed our perceptions, categories and measurement "for natural effects go beyond all number, as being infinite" (*OUEP* 38).

As Cavendish alters the gendered signifying domain, which constituted the conceptions of early modern bodies, she simultaneously challenges other aspects of early modern culture. Understandings of the body deeply affected the organization of society and women's corporeal 'leakiness' was associated with excessive female verbal fluency. Early modern women were expected to be silent, obedient and chaste. Though this was not necessarily always the reality, it was nonetheless the ideology founding women's role in society.[103] The leaky vessel was threatening since it could transgress the doctrine of female silence (and consequently, female obedience in general) with its natural inclination towards verbal leakiness. The

[103] For an excellent understanding of women's status and the actual reality of their lives, in relation to education, religion, law, work and writing see the first part of Anita Pacheco, ed., *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002).

"whore was the leakiest of all female vessels in part because of her tendency to linguistic overflow."[104] Like women's sexual voracity, the leaky body could pose a grotesque comic threat to patriarchy.[105] Paster argues that representations of "the female body as a leaking vessel display that body as beyond the control of the female subject, and thus as threatening the acquisitive goals of the family and its maintenance of status and power."[106] The naturally grotesque female body was a site which could potentially escape any boundary or limit.[107]

XI. Women and Discourse

Cultural understandings of gender and female 'leakiness' are questioned not only through the scientific content of *Philosophical Letters*, but also simultaneously through its format, demonstrating how power functions through multiple cultural practices. The literary structure of the text itself challenges gendered ideology. For example, the association between the incomplete, leaky female body and women's speaking is disrupted as the text is framed as an exchange of letters between two women. Dualisms such as irrationality/reason, private/public, and their associations with woman/man are questioned and Cavendish creates a fictional female character with whom she discusses and argues scientific and philosophical positions. Though the reader only can see Cavendish's side of the correspondence, it is striking that Cavendish chose to discourse about 'masculine' topics with a fictional woman, rather

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[104] Paster 151. For more information regarding the connection between verbal excess and bodily excess, see chapter 1, "Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy," 23-63.
[105] Ibid. 23-63.
[106] Ibid. 25.
[107] Sawday 9, 10.

than a man, since female speech and discourse has historically, in western culture, been described in derogatory terms. Even contemporary descriptions of female speech demonstrate the cultural anxiety and hostility still surrounding the vocal woman. Women's language is gossip, chatter, bitching, nagging, prattle and babbling; a language which is nonsensical, irrational, useless and devoid of reason, intellect and authority. Like seventeenth-century understandings of women's speech, men still do not have the same negative connotations attached to their discourse, which suggests that there is something culturally subversive and threatening in the speaking, public woman. [108]

Anxiety about women's speech was certainly prevalent in the seventeenth-century, particularly since women were taught that female virtues were silence, chastity and obedience, which were one and the same. Thirty five years before the publication of *Philosophical Letters*, Richard Brathwaite in 1631, demonstrates the anxiety surrounding women's discourse when he claimed that "in no way detract they more from their honour, than by giving too much free scope to that glibbery member."[109] A woman's tongue is merely a nonsensical organ or a 'glibbery member' that does not communicate reason. Pens were the tools of reason and were made analogous to men's weapons and the pun on 'pen' and 'penis' were common

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[108] Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory, 2nd ed.* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003) 205-212. While examining a student's paper that discussed men's discourse, Cameron realized that the supposed 'feminine' aspects of male conversation such as gossip, cooperative speaking and tag questions went unnoticed in the analysis. Although the 'feminine' modes of speaking were dominant within the conversations, only the 'masculine' topics were recorded. Cameron argues that this paper exemplifies how even when trying to deconstruct gender, people still place gender stereotypes on discourse. See Deborah Cameron, "Performing Gender Identity: Young Men's Talk and the Construction of Heterosexual Masculinity," *Language and Gender: A Reader*, ed. Jennifer Coates (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) 270-284.

[109] Richard Brathwaite, *The English gentlewoman (*1631), qtd. in Helen Hackett, "Courtly Writing by Women," *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500-1700*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996) 171.

metaphors, demonstrating that writing and public discourse were conceived as a fundamentally masculine domain.[110] Trill, Chedgzoy and Osborne argue that "since a woman was supposed to be silent, obedient, and chaste, a loquacious woman was perceived to be disobedient and sexually licentious. In this socio-cultural context, therefore, for a woman to express herself was simultaneously to bring her reputation into doubt."[111] It is thus significant that Cavendish chose to discuss and print her science within the discourse of two women.

In publicly displaying in print, two women discussing 'masculine' topics such as science and philosophy, Cavendish disrupts and questions cultural conceptions of a genderized world, where strict gender binaries allot women an inferior, private, irrational and silent position, appropriate for their status as social subordinates. Rather than completely severing herself from the negative associations of feminine speech or female verbal 'leakiness', Cavendish embraces the form of female discourse to theorize within the public, patriarchal framework, thus redefining and renegotiating cultural notions of women's discourse and privacy.[112] The very framework of the text confuses the masculine with the feminine, in itself challenging and disrupting social codes that define gender since two women are discussing subjects deemed inappropriate for women's speech. The letters never stray from scientific, philosophical subjects, questioning the notion that women's discourse is

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[110] Margaret W. Ferguson, "Renaissance Concepts of the 'Woman Writer,'" *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500-1700*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 152.

[111] Suzanne Trill, Kate Chedgzoy and Melanie Osborne, eds. Introduction, *Lay By Your Needles Ladies, Take The Pen*, eds. Suzanne Trill, Kate Chedgzoy, and Melanie Osborne (London: Arnold, 1997) 4.

[112] Even in contemporary feminist criticism, scholars argue that men and women are socialized to use language in different ways and that such modes of discourse reflect their superior or inferior social status. For example, Jennifer Coates claims that "male speakers in our culture are socialised into public discourse, while female speakers are socialised into private discourse" (Jennifer Coates,

nonsensical. Cavendish further legitimizes women's speech when she asks her fictional friend to support and validate her theories as she formally declares that her "opinions in Natural Philosophy, desire the assistance of [her] favour, or else they will die" (*PL* 451). Thus, Cavendish's 'masculine' reason is confirmed and sustained by another woman, rather than by male approval. Cavendish publicly places her ideas in a correspondence between two women that confirm and create a feminine model of reason and intellectual authority within a male dominated intellectual tradition.

Although Cavendish uses the form of a letter correspondence to theorize her science, her approach is more methodological than her previous works: she defines her terms more thoroughly; considers potential counter-arguments; and contrasts her opinions throughout most of the text with those of her male contemporaries. Cavendish is thus firmly placing herself in relation to the public, intellectual, male tradition. Since *Philosophical Letters* was also written to clarify and respond to objections from her previous work, *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, it reminds the reader that her texts were printed and read by her contemporaries; that she was interacting within the public sphere, regardless of the obstacle of printing being seen as public and thus immodest for a woman.[113] Since *Philosophical Letters* is argued through a more methodological and public approach, perhaps it would seem strange that the text is structured in the form of a letter correspondence.

"Gossip Revisited: Language in All-Female Groups," *Language and Gender: A Reader*, ed. Jennifer Coates (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) 270-284).

[113] Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing, 1649-88* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989). Attacks upon publishing women's sexuality can be seen in the example of Lady Wroth. The Baron of Walthan wrote a bitter poem in revenge against Lady Wroth, whom he described as a "hermaphrodite," and wrote an angry series of letters that eventually reached the hands of James I. See Josephine A Roberts, "Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*: A Response to Jacobean

Critics Gilbert and Gubar argue that alienation and anxiety are obstacles that face women authors within a patriarchal, literary tradition.

> the loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessors coupled with her need for sisterly precursors and successors, her urgent sense of her need for a female audience together with her fear of the antagonism of male readers, her culturally conditioned timidity about self-dramatization, her dread of the patriarchal authority of art, her anxiety about the impropriety of female invention-all these phenomena of 'inferiorization' mark the woman writer's struggle for artistic self-definition[114]

The belief that women writers experienced obstacles to authorship since they were isolated and intimidated within a patriarchal intellectual tradition may seem particularly relevant in *Philosophical Letters* since Cavendish claims that "the form of Letters" was "the easiest way for me to write" (*PL* sig. B1r). Yet, Cavendish does not explain why letters facilitate her authorship. Mihoko Suzuki argues that the "normative paradigm of scholarly investigation as tortured, violent, and aggressively heterosexual pursuit of feminized Nature by male scholars implicitly excludes women such as Cavendish from such activities."[115] Did Cavendish create a female companion and a letter correspondence as merely a stratagem to justify or ease her entrance into a misogynistic male dominated tradition? This question will later be answered, but in order to analyze the function of a letter format, it is necessary to understand the practice and meaning of letter writing in relation to gender and privacy in the seventeenth-century.

Censorship," *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985-1991*, ed. W. Speed Hill (New York: Renaissance English Text Society, 1993) 125.

[114] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "Infection in the Sentence: the Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship," *Feminisms: an Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticisms*, eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (Houndsmills: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997) 24.

[115] Mihoko Suzuki, *Subordinate Subjects: Gender, the Political Nation, and Literary Form in England, 1588-1688* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003) 197.

XII. Early Modern Letter Writing

Seventeenth-century letters were related to the private sphere since they not only served as correspondence between individuals, but much of the mundane, everyday household management was recorded through letter writing.[116] Though contemporary society associates letter writing with privacy, letters were not entirely part of the private domain.[117] For example, they were a much more public medium then in later eras, particularly since there is evidence that personal letters were often read aloud and regarded as common property of families or groups.[118] Both men and women also often employed secretaries to write as they orally dictated their letters and third parties would occasionally be asked to edit rough drafts of letters, further disrupting the idea of letters being a medium of private communication.[119] Also, many unintended eyes such as those of servants or other interceptors from unfriendly factions could also possibly read the material.[120] The awareness of the lack of privacy and the potential of unwanted interceptors within the practice of letter writing was so great that it led people such as Lady Brilliana during the civil war to create a special code so that her husband could decipher her messages.[121] Thus, letters were

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[116] Rosemary O'Day, "Tudor and Stuart Women: their Lives through their Letters," *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Hampshire: Palgrave Publishers Ltd., 2001) 135.

[117] O'Day claims that women's letters focused on aspects of life that were not central within letters between men. However, "it would be far too simplistic to see this as a straightforward distinction between the 'public' and the 'private'" (Ibid. 128).

[118] Ibid. 129.

[119] James Daybell, "Women's Letters and Letter Writing in England, 1540-1603: An Introduction to the Issues of Authorship and Construction," *Shakespeare Studies* 27 (1990): 161-186.

[120] Sara Jayne Steen, "'Behind the Arras': Editing Renaissance Women's Letters," *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985-1991*, ed. W. Speed Hill (New York: Renaissance English Text Society, 1993) 230.

[121] Jacqueline Eales, "Patriarchy, Puritanism and Politics: the letters of Lady Brilliana Harley (1598-1643)," *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Hampshire: Palgrave Publishers Ltd., 2001) 148.

seemingly a personal, private form of communication, yet they did not strictly function within a private/public dichotomy.

Not only was the privacy of readership questionable, women often digressed from their private, feminine role through letters. Letters were a space where women could perform their familial duties through communicating for the family, offering medical advice, arranging marriages, organizing family matters or even performing more political roles as they wrote to influential people as advocates or negotiators for their husbands and families.[122] Unmarried women or spinsters could be used as political spies for family patriarchs since they were expected to maintain written correspondences that related the business and politics of the families they lived with.[123] Women were thus able to perform more public roles within letter writing as they administered family business. Although women were often not as educated as men, the social expectation was that women could write their own letters in order to perform duties appropriate to their gender.[124] Letter writing was a socially acceptable and valid form of female expression and literacy, yet could not entirely be defined as private and feminine.[125] Sara Jayne Steen argues that "the letter was an elastic category in the Renaissance, including not only the personal and business letters we write, but what we would handle by telephone, the subtle political and social

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[122] O'Day 127-142.

[123] Susan Whyman, "Gentle Companions: Single Women and their Letters in Late Stuart England," *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Hampshire: Palgrave Publishers Ltd., 2001) 182.

[124] Daybell argues the use of secretaries or scribes meant that educational barriers did not exclude women from letter writing. See James Daybell, "Female Literacy and the Social Conventions of Women's Letter-Writing in England, 1540-1603," *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Hampshire: Palgrave Publishers Ltd., 2001) 72, 73.

[125] Daybell argues that letters from men and women discuss matters of public and private, domestic and political natures. James Daybell, Introduction, *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Hampshire: Palgrave Publishers Ltd., 2001) 3.

negotiations that we could conduct in person."[126] Letters were a literary form that was necessary for the female role, yet could not strictly fit into gender categories.

XIII. Categories and Truth

Regarding Cavendish's general dislike of categories and gender dichotomies, it is not surprising that she chose a form such as female letter writing to convey her theories. Kate Lilley claims that Cavendish "is most engaged by that which troubles or resists categorization, thereby engendering reflection on the nature and function of categorization itself. Both Cavendish herself, and her writings, have similarly challenged categorization."[127] Cavendish often mixes or hybridizes binaries and categories in their multifaceted forms. As previously mentioned, Cavendish often intermixes the dualism of absolute truth and fiction. Since the belief in an objective truth in science was growing during the seventeenth-century, the form of letter writing as a means to theorize science would consequently remind the reader of the personal perspective within the supposed value-neutral truth of scientific inquiry. Since letters were often read by others than the addressee, it then would be necessary for the writer, particularly women writers, to create a different persona, one that was most socially acceptable.[128] A letter correspondence between women would particularly be effective in demonstrating the personal voice and perspective within science since the ideological obstacles encountered by women in relation to writing would make self-dramatization more crucial. Women were engaged in shaping

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[126] Steen 237.

[127] Kate Lilley, Introduction, *Margaret Cavendish: The Blazing World and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Classics, 1994) xi.

different versions of the self for specific audiences they were addressing as they negotiated between writing and the private, feminine domain of chastity, obedience and silence.[129] Through letters, the Renaissance woman fashioned herself in prose.[130] Using the form of women's letters to explicate science is a continual reminder of the personal perspective within the scientific process, that the discourse of science also had an individual perspective, laden with values. Thus, the scientific claim of objectivity would be contradicted and would seem less plausible within the form of letter writing.

Although it is possible Cavendish used the letter as a stratagem to justify her writing and ease her insecurity as a woman writer, it seems more likely that she chose the letter as an apparatus to transgress categories and boundaries. Value systems and social hierarchy are maintained and reaffirmed through various categories and institutions, giving the appearance of a stable, unchanging truth. Since Cavendish's science questions binary thought and the notion of an objective truth, it is appropriate that Cavendish structured her science within a format that confuses social categories and conventions, challenging the reader to see the world from a different framework. Like *The Blazing World*, which is a piece of science and fantasy intermixed,[131] *Philosophical Letters* also uses a hybrid format. As Cavendish conveys her scientific theories within the form of letter writing, Cavendish mixes privacy, femininity and fiction within reason, masculinity and science. In simultaneously traversing boundaries of private/public, man/woman and truth/fiction, cultural value-systems

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[128] O'Day argues that to "each of the recipients the writer presents a different persona" (Ibid. 141).
[129] Kim Walker, "'Busie in my Clositt': Letters, Diaries, and Autobiographical Writing," *Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996) 27.
[130] See Steen 237.
[131] Keller, "Producing Petty Gods: Margaret Cavendish's Critique of Experimental Science," 460, 461.

are questioned, contradicted and subverted since the ways in which a society categorize and perceive the world are blurred and intermixed, creating or opening possibilities for new perspectives and politics.

Yet, it is not just in the use of letters that Cavendish challenges categorical distinctions; her theory of nature brings life, power and knowledge into concepts such as matter, body and nature that were entrenched within the feminine side of the male/female dichotomy; demonstrating that gender ideology is maintained by an intricate system of cultural associations and analogies. Keller argues that even in contemporary times "we see our world divided by a multiplicity of conceptual and social dichotomies - mutually sanctioning, mutually supportive, and mutually defining: public or private, masculine or feminine, objective or subjective, power or love."[132] Cavendish does not simply subvert the specific binary of masculine and feminine, but realizes how dichotomies mutually define each other and conceptual reality. If the associations between women, passivity, irrationality and matter are disrupted, then multiple justifications and rationales for their subjection are challenged. Butler suggests that power functions more from within such gender polarities than from the actual social relations that it influences.

> Power seemed to be more than an exchange between subjects or a relation of constant inversion between a subject and an Other; indeed, power appeared to operate in the production of that very binary frame for thinking about gender. I asked, what configuration of power constructs the subject and the Other, that binary relation between "men" and "women", and the internal stability of those terms?[133]

Early modern understandings of gender demonstrate how binaries function and support each other on various levels. The binaries of man/woman and their

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[132] Eve Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, 8.

associations with active/passive, reason/irrationality, perfect/imperfect in scientific thought effected everyday lives and politics since it rationalized the need for women's silence, obedience and subjection.

As Cavendish systematically deconstructs metaphors, analogies and cultural associations that define and maintain authority, she reveals the multifaceted dimensions of how power functions and creates social reality, particularly how the belief of natural gender differences and consequently, male superiority are entrenched within the way society perceives and experiences the world. As Cavendish critiques and absorbs aspects from various sciences, she playfully revises scientific metaphors and ideas that maintain sex hierarchy. Power does not merely function in social interactions, but is supported and justified by ideology and a complimentary epistemological system. Thus, Cavendish strategically attacks in multiple, diverse ways, the metaphors that define gender within her society.

Categories and binaries that many scientific and cultural metaphors are based upon do not operate within Cavendish's active, living, infinite force called Nature. Within this worldview, prevalent gendered conceptions of nature, body, and mind cannot accord or be reconciled. The very format of *Philosophical Letters* is appropriate as it represents and mirrors the disruptive tendencies within the actual text. The use of the private, literary form of the letter and female discourse to express scientific theories exemplifies Cavendish's characteristic resistance to category, convention and rules. Similar to the format of female letter writing that can subvert traditional patriarchal categories, Cavendish mixes and hybridizes categories and cultural metaphors, challenging common, accepted perceptions of the world. Rather

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[133] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, vii, viii.

than simplifying, universalizing or placing the world and morality into a comprehensible box, Cavendish complicates and stretches the universe into dizzying perspectives, where she cannot be restrained by categories, science and patriarchal traditions.

2

Liminal Spaces: Cavendish's Approach to Magic, Spirituality and Gender

As Cavendish redefines multiple categories and dichotomies embedded within science, she alters the foundations of how the early modern world was perceived. However, science was only one aspect of early modern culture. Lisa Sarasohn argues that Cavendish often "shows how the radical implications of one area of thought can reinforce and strengthen the subversive tendencies of another, quite different attack on authority."[1] Cavendish's scientific approach also challenges the basic foundation of early modern culture and society; the politics of religion. Cavendish's science can be perplexing, particularly since she often applies seemingly unrelated, contradictory ideas or genres to each other. This is particularly apparent in her approach to spiritual matters which is arguably the most enigmatic aspect of her thought. Cavendish was unusually secular for the mid seventeenth-century, particularly for a female writer. Though she could be understood as a dedicated materialist, much of her fiction paradoxically focuses upon on the supernatural, particularly witchcraft, spirits, hermetic magic and fairies. Exploring her science facilitates an understanding of Cavendish's use of spirituality in fiction and reveals how such an approach questions gendered ideology within religious conceptions of the world. This chapter will explore the uneasy relationship between Cavendish and

spirituality, demonstrating how she rejects while simultaneously appropriates religious concepts, using them to create a unique scientific and political outlook.

Considering her material and secular science, it may seem strange to focus upon Cavendish in relation to religion. Yet, early modern politics was also intrinsically bound to religious thought. "Religion was such a vital cement for maintaining social and political order that, for almost everybody, genuine separation of church and state was unthinkable."[2] How an individual envisioned religion had direct implications for politics since church and state were essentially linked.[3] Since the monarch was ordained by God, the relationship between an individual and God could parallel an individual's conception of political order. To fully understand Cavendish's ideology, it is necessary to explore how her scientific theories relates to early modern spirituality since even a secular outlook will have vast political connotations in regards to monarchy and sexual politics.

I. Hidden Atheism

Cavendish is routinely regarded in criticism as unconventional and secular. Some scholars even argue that her philosophy implies atheism. For example, Jay Stevenson argues that "much of Cavendish's work smacks of atheism in that it suggests the mind has no direct spiritual connection to God, but is wholly physical

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[1] Lisa T. Sarasohn, "A Science Turned Upside Down: Feminism and the Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish," *Huntington Library Quarterly: A Journal for the History and Interpretation of English and American Civilization* 47.4 (1984): 290.

[2] M. H. Abrams, ed., "The Early Seventeenth Century, 1603-1660," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. 1, 7th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000) 1212.

and left to its own devices."[4] However, it is not just the mind, but the entire material world is corporeal, indicating an even more unorthodox strain to her thought. Although Cavendish was perceived as an established and respected writer, some seventeenth-century readers still accused her of atheism. For example, John Stansby claims that Cavendish is "The great atheistical philosophraster, That owns no God, no devil, lord nor master."[5] However, often the term atheist was merely "an empty smear word used to discredit intellectual and other positions disapproved of by those who employed it" [6] Though Stansby's attack may have merely been an empty smear, Ralph Cudworth, who was influenced by aspects of her thought, nonetheless dismisses Cavendish's materialist philosophy as too atheistic.[7] Yet, atheism did not necessarily have the same connotation in the seventeenth-century as it does now. Frederick Valletta demonstrates that, in 1642, a pamphlet defined atheists as "people who would have no church-government" and who "live in an independent way." [8] There is no mention of not believing in God, but rather it was more concerned about the failure to recognize the church. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century, atheism also often merely meant a nonconformist and covered a wide range

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[3] For example, absolutists believed that since monarchs were ordained by God, they were not accountable to their subjects and their power was absolute. J.P. Sommerville, *Royalists & Patriots: Politics and Ideology in England, 1603-1640*, 2nd ed. (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 1999).

[4] Jay Stevenson, "Imagining the Mind: Cavendish's Hobbesian Allegories," *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish*, ed. Stephen Clucas (Aldershot: Ashgate 2003) 144.

[5] John Stansby, qtd. in Emma L. E. Rees, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) 2.

[6] Michael Hunter, *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy: Intellectual Change in Late Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995) 229.

[7] Jacqueline Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 53.

[8] Frederick Valletta, *Witchcraft, Magic and Superstition in England, 1640-70* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2000) 66. The proliferation of sects during the Interregnum was frequently blamed for weakening the religious consensus and encouraging skepticism, leading to the belief that sectarianism led to atheism. See Ibid. 90.

of heresies that did not necessarily indicate unbelief.[9] However, by the mid-seventeenth-century atheists were seen as people who denied the existence of God, either directly or by implication. It was self-evident to many that unbelief would be sustained by materialistic ideology that understood a natural world that had originated without a beneficent creator and in which God's activity was limited or completely absent.[10] Many feared that if God did not intervene in the affairs of humanity, the existence of a deity was indirectly challenged.[11] Cavendish dangerously embodied many of these definitions of atheism. She often attacked the notion of religious truth, and church hierarchy does not appear within her writings. More importantly though, God's power is virtually absent within Cavendish's world since he has given free reign to Nature.

It is also significant that Cavendish appropriates some of the most threatening aspects of early modern science. Mechanism was troubling since it could "easily be taken too far, raising the spectre of an entirely materialist view of the world," on the other hand, there were difficulties with vitalist ideas

> which might be seen to imbue matter with a life of its own, possibly even extending to the ability to replicate itself: the idea of spontaneous generation was alarming because it implied that the universe could subsist without the need for a divine creator and sustainer.[12]

Cavendish's science did indeed take ideas of mechanism further, theorizing a more secular universe while also appropriating the most threatening aspects of vitalism as well: a natural, material world that generates and creates itself without being affected by God. Furthermore, Carolyn Merchant argues that an "animistic concept of nature

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[9] Ibid. 66.
[10] Hunter 229.
[11] Valletta 66.
[12] Hunter 15.

as a divine, self active organism came to be associated with atheistical and radical libertarian ideas."[13] Cavendish was treading on very dangerous, unorthodox grounds.

II. The Epistemological Problem

A key to understanding Cavendish's perception of spiritual matters is to discern how she bridges the gulf between acceptable orthodoxy and her radical science. Many of the puzzling aspects of Cavendish's thought can be made clear through this approach. Michael Hunter claims that it has "been argued of a number of heterodox thinkers of the early modern period that, at a time when the threat of prosecution made the open statement of atheistic opinion dangerous, the safest alternative was to imply such views without actually saying them."[14] It would be anachronistic not to take into account these limitations when understanding more secular and unorthodox thinkers such as Cavendish. It is thus crucial not only to understand her science, but to also discern how she bypassed such ideological restrictions.

Cavendish's philosophy destabilizes categories and polarized opposites. However, her complex challenge to binary thought is limited by what initially appears as one strange inflexible dualism. Although Cavendish theorizes a material universe with a corporeal soul, Cavendish argues that the material world is severed from and opposed to a spirit world; "Spirit and Body are things of Contrary Natures" (*PL* 197). In contrast to her science which suggests all of nature is connected and

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[13] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (London: Wildwood House, 1982) 121.
[14] Hunter 299.

material, matter and a supernatural world both exist, yet are incompatible; "Neither can supernatural and natural effects be mixt together, no more then material and immaterial things or beings" (*PL* 11). Creating an unconnected world that is placed in polar opposition to our own seems very uncharacteristic for Cavendish. Though she often plays with contradictions, this seems completely unconnected to her overall theoretical position which is essentially anti-dualist.

This uncharacteristic binary begins to have a meaningful function when understood in context of what was considered acceptable in seventeenth-century print. Cavendish realized the potential religious controversy in describing a material, quasi-vitalist nature. Indeed she very self-consciously argues she is not an atheist; "Concerning my belief of God, I submit wholly to the Church, and believe as I have bin informed out of the Athanasian Creed" (*PL* 141). This dilemma is solved by creating a parallel spiritual reality alongside the material world that contains heterodox concepts and values, but does not mix with or effect matter.

> Neither am I against those Spirits, which the holy Scripture mentions, as Angels and Devils, and the divine Soul of Man; but I say onely, that no Immaterial Spirit belongs to Nature, so as to be a part thereof; for Nature is Material, or Corporeal; and whatsoever is not composed of matter or body, belongs not to Nature; nevertheless, Immaterial Spirits may be in Nature, although not parts of Nature. But there can neither be an Immaterial Nature, nor a Natural Immaterial (*PL* 187).

Cavendish would not be able to argue against the existence of angels and devils, so she places them in a locale separate and distinct from physical reality. If such spirits can in a sense exist within the natural world, yet cannot exert influence upon matter or any specific 'parts' such as humanity, they do not need to be part of scientific inquiry. Cavendish is then free to explore and theorize a material, animist world.

The supernatural side of the binary not only contains angels and devils, but further holds a divine human soul. "Wherefore not any Creature can challenge a soul absolutely to himself, unless Man, who hath a divine soul, which no other Creature hath" (*PL* 430). Her animism is less problematic within this framework since soulified matter does not entirely displace the belief in a Christian soul. Although she envisions a world where all of matter, whether it is as small as an atom is soulified, she is able to nonetheless remain somewhat orthodox by claiming there is a divine soul that is specific to humanity. Consequently, by creating two distinct realities that do not interact, Cavendish can focus upon natural phenomena without having to adhere to religious doctrine and explain biblical spirits directly into her epistemology. In taking the concept of a dualism to its logical extreme, matter and immaterial beings do not interact at all. An animistic, materialist philosophy can be explored in this context without creating fundamental epistemological contradictions; "I meddle not with the Particular Divine Souls of Men, but only the General Soul of Nature" (*PPO* b2r). Cavendish has placed religion aside, where religious concepts exist, but in a reality that does not touch her world.

Gender politics also are affected by a world not directly run by godly powers. The material/immaterial binary allows Nature infinite power and will, but paradoxically does not heretically supersede the 'superior', spiritual power of God. God is the only spirit that can transcend this binary since he is the creator of Nature. Since God has granted Nature this power, it is given by God and is orthodox.

> But you will say perhaps, if I attribute an Infinite Wisdom, Strength, Power, Knowledge, &c. to Nature; then Nature is in all coequal with God, for God has the same Attributes: I answer, Not at all; for I desire you to understand me rightly, when I speak of Infinite Nature, and when I speak of the Infinite Deity, sor [*sic*] there is great difference between them, for it is one thing a

> Deitical or Divine Infinite, and another a Natural Infinite; You know, that God is a Spirit, and not a bodily substance, again that Nature is a Body, and not a Spirit, and therefore none of these Infinites can obstruct or hinder each other (*PL* 8)

Establishing a binary between Nature and God allows God to be omnipotent, while simultaneously permitting Nature to retain infinite material power, wisdom and strength. Natural and spiritual knowledge are entirely distinct, both containing different types of knowledge. Acting as viceroy for God, Nature still has limitless power within her domain, not moved, controlled or ultimately mastered by male force.

The most explicit suggestion of unorthodox thought occurs when Cavendish refers to immaterial concepts as 'No-thing'.

> for an Incorporeal being is as much as a natural No-thing, for Natural reason cannot know nor have naturally any perception or Idea of an Incorporeal being (*PL* 78)

In stating that an incorporeal being is 'No-thing', she is playfully implying that they are indeed nothing, that they do not exist. From the perspective of material creatures, God and angels would in effect not exist at all. Since there is no interaction or intermixing of the material/immaterial binary, than immaterial entities cannot be comprehended. "I do not deny the Existence of Immaterial spirits, but onely that they are not parts of Nature, but supernatural; for there may be many things above Nature, and so above a natural Understanding, and Knowledge" (*PL* 321). People cannot understand immaterial beings and thus cannot transcend their limited material position to perceive spirits or God.

Cavendish seems aware and even troubled by the problematic nature of her material/immaterial binary. Though it could be argued this opposition between spirit

and matter simply exemplifies Cavendish's characteristic and enigmatic use of contradictions, she attempts to remain consistent in her challenge to binary thought as she argues that though this appears as an opposition, the separate and contrary natures of matter and spirit do not make them opposing principles; "God and Nature are not opposites, except you will call opposites those which bear a certain relation to one another, as a Cause, and its Effect; a Parent, and a Child; a Master, and a Servant; and the like" (*PL* 458). Rather than conceptualizing them as dualistic, God and Nature are connected, as all of matter is connected within the natural world. They are rather different realities that are related, but do not directly affect or influence one another. Yet, as much as she argues that this is a relational principle between the immaterial world and matter, they are fundamentally a dichotomy since immaterial spirit exists, yet is completely severed from and defined against matter.

Cavendish's spirit/matter separation not only facilitates heterodox views, she further controversially defends atheists, arguing that it "is better, to be an Atheist, then a superstitious man; for in Atheisme there is humanitie, and civility, towards man to man; but superstition regards no humanity, but begets cruelty to all things, even to themselves" (*TWO* sig. H2v). Since atheists were often understood as being synonymous with immoral behavior and beliefs,[15] this defense, along with her belief that spirit is 'No-thing', challenges and reverses early modern conceptions of atheism in relation to morality.

Though her science is radically secular and even possibly atheistic, seventeenth-century politics was not generally accepting of atheism. Even as late as 1695, an act was passed that declared that those should be punished who

> in their writing or discourse, deny, impugn or quarrell, argue or reason, against the being of God, or any of the persons of the blessed Trinity, or the Authority of the Holy Scriptures of the old and new Testaments, or the providence of God in the Government of the World[16]

Furthermore, no individual at the time openly admitted to being an atheist.[17] Although many individuals were genuinely religious, twenty-first century readers must be aware of the limitations and lack of freedom of expression that faced intellectuals. Though Cavendish's strange inflexible binary is problematic, it makes sense in context of these intellectual obstacles. In creating a parallel immaterial reality that does not interact with matter, Cavendish is ultimately creating a space to safely place religion without allowing it interfere with or compromise her own material philosophy.

III. The Politics of Atheism

If the spiritual and the material are two worlds contained within their own dimensions, humanity not only is incapable of perceiving anything immaterial, but cannot understand it either. Cavendish defends her position by claiming that "Gods wayes are incomprehensible and supernatural." (*PL* 527). She suggests that she is more pious than most scientists because she does not presume to be able to understand the divine. Although she states God exists, she argues that humanity cannot "have an Idea of the essence of God, so as to know what God is in his very

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[15] Ibid. 230, 231.
[16] Ibid. 312.
[17] Ibid. 232. For example, as late as 1697, a University of Edinburgh student, who was under twenty one years old and technically a minor, achieved notoriety as a free-thinking atheist. He was later charged and executed for blasphemy, even after confessing and providing a public repentance.

nature and essence; for how can there be a finite Idea of an Infinite God?" (*PL* 139). If the individual cannot comprehend or even have an idea of God, than the foundations for church hierarchy are challenged. A priest would not necessarily understand God more than any other person. Strangely, both Cavendish and the radical puritans challenge church hierarchy and redefine the relationship between an individual and God, but from very different positions. Unlike the sectarians who were radically arguing that all people have a personal relation to God and thus equal access to the divine, Cavendish is suggesting that we are all equal because nobody has access to God. Yet, it is not just people for "there is infinite Life, so infinite Knowledge, all which makes an infinite Equality in infinite Matter, which is infinite Nature" (*PPO* 10). All aspects of the material world are equally distant from God and equally filled with life and knowledge.

Though both Cavendish and radical puritans are seemingly opposite, their ideas both result in a more egalitarian understanding of humanity.[18] If every person has an equal relation to God, or if a person cannot conceive of immaterial spirit in any way, than no individual is more receptive to God compared to others. Following this rationale, how could one individual such as a monarch be godly ordained? Monarchy would have to be justified on very different terms. King Charles' final statement before execution claims that kingship was the duty he owed to God and anyone who usurps that duty is sinful for there "is a God in heaven that will call you,

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Although this was unusual by this period, it demonstrates the religious obstacles faced by more unorthodox scientists such as Cavendish. See Hunter's chapter "'Aikenhead the Atheist,'" 308-332.

[18] Some scholars have found it useful to compare Cavendish with the sectarians. For example, Sue Wiseman examines the relationship between female performance and radical female prophecy and Katharine Gillespie compares Cavendish's and Elizabeth Poole's understanding of contract theory. See Sue Wiseman, "Margaret Cavendish among the Prophets: performance ideologies and gender in and after the English Civil War," *Women's Writing* 6.1 (1999): 95-111 and Katharine Gillespie,

and all that give you power, to account."[19] This justification could not work within the theoretical parameters of atheism. Royalist theorist, Filmer links atheism and religious toleration with opposition to monarchy. He argues that "the liberty that a popular estate can brag of, every man may be of any religion, or no religion, if he please. Their main devotion is exercised only in opposing and suppressing monarchy."[20] Though there were secular arguments for monarchy, which will be discussed in depth in later chapters, the typical justification for monarchical politics was God, and removing God from political structures could have very subversive connotations.

IV. Atheism and Witchcraft

If challenging God's influence in the everyday natural world was threatening, questioning satanic powers was equally subversive. Since in Cavendish's thought, all immaterial beings exist in a reality that does not touch our own, than nature also cannot be controlled or mastered by diabolical spirits. Similar to more benevolent spirits, evil is also a 'No-thing' which cannot affect Nature.

> all things Immaterial, as Spirits, Angels, Devils, and the divine Soul of Man, are no parts of Nature, but Supernatural, Nature knowing of no Creature that belongs to her, but what is material; and since incorporeal Creatures are no parts of Nature, they neither have natural actions (*PL* 227)

Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century: English Women's Writing and the Public Sphere (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[19] Charles I, "The King's Final Word: 'I Speak Not for My Right Alone,'" *Political Ideas of the English civil wars, 1641-1649*, ed. Andrew Sharp (Harlow: Essex, 1983) 50.

[20] Robert Filmer, "Observations upon Aristotles Politiques," *Filmer: Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 257.

Since evil does not influence the world and cannot have 'natural actions', it does not occur in Nature. However, Cavendish remains orthodox to a degree, by stating Satan exists, but does not affect the natural world. Cavendish again uses the material/immaterial binary to place immaterial concepts that were an obstacle to her thinking, yet were necessary to remain within the limits of acceptability.

> I believe that there is a Devil, as the Word of God and the Church inform me, yet I am not of the opinion, that God should suffer him to have such a familiar conjunction, and make such contracts with Man, as to impower him to do mischief and hurt to others, or to foretell things to come (*PL* 227)

Contracts with devils and obtaining diabolical familiars were particularly crucial in English interpretations of witchcraft. If humans could not make contracts with devils, cannot foretell the future and are not empowered by supernatural forces, than witchcraft could not exist.[21] Yet, denying satanic influences and witchcraft was controversial claim for her era. Valletta claims that "demonologists noted that not to believe in the existence of the devil was akin to atheism. This view also held good with respect to the belief in witchcraft."[22] Hunter also argues that in general, during this period, to "deny outright the reality of witchcraft was thus a position of doubtful orthodoxy, and at the time it was widely seen as part of the phenomenon of 'atheism'."[23] Though Lynn Thorndike argues that Bacon, whose ideas founded the Royal Society, "had little faith in witchcraft," the Royal society had differences of opinion regarding the supernatural.[24] Indeed, many members during the 1660s and

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[21] Hobbes also disclaims the belief that witches could foretell future events since predictions from witches "is but juggling and confederate knavery" (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 81). However, unlike Cavendish, Hobbes explicitly rejects spiritual entities (except for one omnipotent God), claiming they derived from fear, ignorance and the imagination. Ibid. 81.

[22] Valletta 61.

[23] Hunter 288.

[24] Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic & Experimental Science*, vol. VII (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958) 82 and Hunter 291.

1670s had no doubt that spirits, demons and witches affected the natural world and many scientists, in general, remained committed to the reality of witchcraft.[25] The hermetic scientists, in particular, were fascinated with the phenomenon. For example, Joseph Glanvill argues that "those that dare not bluntly say, *There is No God*, content themselves, (for a fair *step*, and *Introduction*) to deny there are *SPIRITS*, or *WITCHES*."[26] Cavendish's denial of satanic witchcraft associates her even more with radically secular thinking and also becomes part of her challenge to sex hierarchy.

V. The Sexual Politics of Witchcraft

Establishing one dichotomy between spirit and matter ironically enables Cavendish to destabilize the very epistemologies that induce multitudes of gendered binaries. Similar to her theories that argue spirits do not suffuse or move passive, lifeless, female matter, satanic spirits could not effect any part of nature as well; "both fright, cure, and the disease, are made by the rational and sensitive corporeal motions within the body, and not by Supernatural Magick, as Satanical Witchcraft, entering from without into the body by spiritual rays" (*PL* 302). Since evil forces could not effect or penetrate Nature, such malevolent entities could not interfere with the functioning of the natural world. No force whether godly or satanic, could thus potentially govern, influence or contradict the will of a powerful, female Nature.

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[25] Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) 43 and Hunter 10.

[26] Joseph Glanvill, *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, 4th ed. (London, 1668), sigs. Blv-2, qtd. in Hunter 289.

Though Cavendish discusses witches in both her science and fiction, scholarship has not yet attempted to explain her understanding of witchcraft and how this affects her literature. Although skepticism concerning witchcraft did not necessarily indicate a proto-feminist inclination, it had the potential to be used to challenge women's inferior status in religious thought. The distinction between matter and spirit had patriarchal implications not only in scientific understandings of the world, but in religion. Though diverse and contradictory scientific traditions had similar gendered understandings of Nature, religion also had comparable definitions of the sexes. Within Christian thought, men were associated with mind and spirit, while women were linked with the inferior body and the material world. Karen Torjesen argues that although men also possessed a "sexual nature, maleness equated with rationality. Women, in this view, were essentially nothing but sexual beings, limited to one dimension."[27] As previously argued, women were more distant to God in science where woman, body, corruption and sexuality represented the irrational and constantly changing material world. This gender binary, between reason/irrationality and men/women opened up a problematic chasm between woman and God.

The early modern equation between woman with body meant that she was not only more alienated from the divine, but naturally subordinate to man. For example, John Milton demonstrates this chasm in *Paradise Lost* as God and the Angels frequently converse with Adam, but never have direct conversations with Eve.[28] Eve should, consequently, obey Adam, her natural superior who is closer to the divine.

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[27] Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of Their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993) 221.

However, Cavendish secularizes the world to such an extent that there is a chasm equally between God and both sexes. Since God is incomprehensible and spirit does not blend with the material world, men cannot be closer to the divine within this framework.

Women's association with body not only meant that they were further removed from God, but they were also perceived as being naturally more susceptible to evil and satanic influences. Demonologists spent much time theorizing over why women were just so much more wicked than men.[29] For example, inquisitor Heinrich Kramer explains in his relentlessly misogynist *Malleus Maleficarum*, that regarding "intellect, or the understanding of spiritual things, [women] seem to be of a different nature from men" and the reason for this is because "she is more carnal than man."[30] Though Kramer was writing slightly before the early modern period, it demonstrates the common perception in both science and religion that women were defined by body and less connected to reason and God.

Women were considered sexually insatiable and prone therefore to sinful and deviant behavior.[31] The link between woman, body and sexuality consequently had very real and violent consequences. Some scholars estimate that 90% of people indicted for the charge of witchcraft in early modern England were women.[32] However, Christina Larner argues that in specific regions, the proportion of accused

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[28] See John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (London: Longman Ltd, 1998).
[29] Christina Larner, "Was Witch-hunting Woman-hunting?" *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. Darren Oldbridge (London: Routledge, 2002) 275.
[30] Heinrich Kramer, "Malleus Maleficarum 1486," *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 63.
[31] Marianne Hester, "Patriarchal Reconstruction and Witch-hunting," *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. Darren Oldbridge (London: Routledge, 2002) 279.
[32] Jim Sharpe, "Women, Witchcraft and the Legal Process," *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. Darren Oldbridge (London: Routledge, 2002) 289-302; James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2001).

females, who were generally poor and often elderly, was nearer 95-100%.[33] Although the reasons for witch persecution are complex, gender and patriarchy was an intrinsic aspect of it. Marianne Hester claims that "the witch-hunts were a part of, and one example of, the ongoing mechanisms for social control of women within a general context of social change and the reconstruction of a patriarchal society."[34] As feudal society was changing, anxiety over gender and power contributed to the persecutions. Louise Jackson also argues that sexual politics largely influenced witchcraft cases since alleged witchcraft crimes were often deeds that were the opposite of the defined female role:

> The details of the cases refer directly to the traditionally defined feminine space - the home, the kitchen, the sickroom, the nursery: to culturally defined female tasks or occupations and their direct opposites - feeding (poisoning), child-raising (infanticide), healing (harming), birth (death).[35]

By embodying the opposite of virtuous, natural female behavior, the witch was unnatural, thus defining the parameters of women's roles.

James Dalton demonstrates the link between anxiety over gender roles and witchcraft in his pamphlet where he claims that "[the devil] makes the womans tongue and organs instruments of speech."[36] Since women were supposed to be silent, obedient and chaste, Dalton is effectively portraying how transgressing gender roles is associated with diabolical power.

As Cavendish argues against the possibility of satanic witchcraft, she is not only distancing the concept of woman from evil, but argues that the belief in

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[33] Larner 274.
[34] Hester 276.
[35] Louise Jackson, "Witches, Wives and Mothers" *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. Darren Oldbridge (London: Routledge, 2002) 356,357.

witchcraft is problematic for "many a good, old honest woman hath been condemned innocently, and suffered death wrongfully, by the sentence of some foolish and cruel Judges" (*PL* 298). As the judicial system began to be more secular, resembling a more modern court, witchcraft proceedings seemed to be progressing in an opposite direction. Often popular opinion or pressure by mobs influenced court cases and convicted witches were subject to popularly licensed violence and humiliation.[37] Witchcraft was also a very serious charge since in 1563 it became a felony, punishable by death.[38] Although Cavendish does not specifically mention the legalities of witch trials, she does argue that many innocent people, generally poor, elderly, women, were being murdered. In *Poems and Fancies*, the parliament of errors, which are described as existing in the seat of ignorance, declare "*That all women that are poore, old, and illfavoured, must be thought Witches, and be burnt for the same*". This inclusion demonstrates a genuine concern on Cavendish's part for those individuals who were condemned for witchcraft (*PF* 203). Considering her aristocratic social status, witch prosecutions would not have personally affected Cavendish. Although critics have argued that Cavendish is not a 'real' feminist, her specific concern for women who were poor and elderly demonstrates a compassion and political interest in women's issues that were outside of her class and personal situation.

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[36] James Dalton, "A Strange and True Relation of a Young Woman Possest with The Devil," *Lay By Your Needles Ladies, Take The Pen*, eds. Suzanne Trill, Kate Chedgzoy, and Melanie Osborne (London: Arnold, 1997) 163.

[37] Jim Sharpe explains that though the "phenomenon of crowd action or popular attitudes towards criminals or at executions was not limited to witchcraft cases; but the frequency of references to hostile mobs is striking, especially since they were on the fringes of the legal process" (Jim Sharpe 299).

[38] James Sharpe 1.

VI. The Politics of Eve

As Cavendish questions the persecution of witches, she disrupts many of the patriarchal assumptions that found beliefs in witchcraft. The rationale for why women were so much more inclined to evil is explained by King James in his treatise *Daemonologie*.

> The reason is easie: for as that sexe is frailer than men is, so it is easier to be intrapped in these grosse snares of the Devill, as was well proved to be true, by the Serpents deceiving of Eve at the beginning, which makes him the homelier with that sex ever since[39]

Women are morally frailer since they are more associated with body, sense, irrationality and sexuality. Both Kramer and King James argues that this weakness can be traced all the way back to Eve.[40] Yet, this was not an unusual argument or one that was confined to theorists of demonology. Throughout the seventeenth-century, the biblical story of Eve was one of the greatest justifications for the subordination of women. Critics Trill, Chedgzoy and Osborne argue that there was a "belief that women automatically inherited the wayward and capricious characteristics associated with [Eve]; consequently, it was assumed that they were susceptible to heretical or misguided ideas."[41] Patriarchy was justified through this story since women were presumed to be naturally misguided, needing male authority.

The importance of Eve's role in defining womanhood is particularly evident in the *querelle des femmes*, the pamphlet debate regarding the relationship between

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[39] King James, *Daemonologie* [1603] 44, qtd. in Hester 280.

[40] Kramer argues that "since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives" (Kramer 63).

[41] Suzanne Trill, Kate Chedgzoy and Melanie Osborne, Introduction, *Lay By Your Needles Ladies, Take The Pen*, eds. Suzanne Trill, Kate Chedgzoy, and Melanie Osborne (London: Arnold, 1997) 4.

the sexes that occurred in early modern England. For example, Joseph Swetnam's notoriously misogynist pamphlet relied upon the creation story to prove women's inferiority. He argues that woman

> was no sooner made, but straightway her mind was set upon mischief for by her aspiring minde and wanton will, [Eve] quickly procured mans fall, and therefore ever since they are and have beene a woe unto man, and follow the line of their first leader.[42]

Women writers also engaged in *querelle des femmes*, often using the figure of Eve to challenge the powerfully charged sexual politics embedded within this story. Rachel Speght reinterprets the creation story, by arguing that "if Adam had not approved of that deed which Eve had done, and been willing to tread the steps which she had gone, he being her head would have reproved her." [43] Speght points out the contradiction in patriarchal understandings of the creation story; if Adam was ruler, his subordinate could not entirely be blamed for an act that he condoned. Hence, Adam was the moral authority and was not exempt from sin. Though Speght claims that woman was the primary transgressor, she argues that the fall was fundamentally due to Adam; "the punishment of [Eve's] transgression being particular to her own sex, and to none but the female kind. But for the sin of man the whole Earth was cursed."[44] Women were given their own specific punishment, pains in childbirth, but it was really Adam who caused the greater fall. Since man caused the fall, "No more is woman simply to be condemned for man's transgression."[45] In the spirit of

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[42] Joseph Swetnam, "The arraignment of lewd, idle, froward, and unconstant women," *Lay By Your Needles Ladies, Take The Pen*, eds. Suzanne Trill, Kate Chedgzoy, and Melanie Osborne (London: Arnold, 1997) 35.
[43] Rachel Speght, "Rachel Speght, from *A Muzzle for Melastomus*," *Women's Writing of The Early Modern Period, 1588-1688: An Anthology*, ed. Stephanie Hodgson-Wright (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002) 138.
[44] Ibid. 138.
[45] Ibid. 138.

querelle des femmes, Aemilia Lanyer also argues that Adam had more authority and thus bore the responsibility;

> Her fault though great, yet he was most to blame;
> What weakness offered, strength might have refused,
> Being Lord of all, the greater was his shame.[46]

Using the language of patriarchy to counter its own ideology, Lanyer claims that if men are morally stronger and are naturally in authority over women, Adam's sin would consequently be much greater.

> If Eve did err, it was for knowledge sake,
> The fruit being fair persuaded him to fall[47]

As Eve aspired to a higher cause, knowledge, Adam in contrast was swayed by his corporeality; he was merely hungry. Since Eve's behavior is an analogy for the character of women, Lanyer places womanhood within the domain of knowledge, rather than body or irrationality. Since Adam's fault would also define man, man is comically determined not through reason, knowledge or spirit, but rather through his bodily hunger and physical drives.

Cavendish also participates in subverting the gender politics that were justified through the story of the fall in *The Blazing World* when the "Empress asked the spirits, whether it was an evil spirit that tempted Eve, and brought all the mischiefs upon mankind, or whether it was the serpent" (*TBW* 176) The spirits answer that "spirits could not commit actual evils" (*TBW* 176). As in her science, spirits are unable to affect the natural world and consequently cannot commit evil. Without Satan, the tale of Adam and Eve becomes quite a different moral story. Eve

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[46]Aemilia Lanyer, "Aemilia Lanyer from *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*," *Women's Writing of The Early Modern Period, 1588-1688: An Anthology*, ed. Stephanie Hodgson-Wright (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002) 43.
[47] Ibid. 43.

was not tempted by an evil spirit and if God does not exist in this reality, he could not have denied them access to the tree of knowledge, disrupting and complicating the link between woman, evil and the religious justifications for patriarchy.

The story of the fall is also addressed and complicated in *The Traveling Spirit*, a short story in *Nature's Pictures*. In this tale, Adam has a brother, an elderly man who lives in the center of the earth. Initially, the elderly man appears to voice the common interpretation of Eve as an explanation for women's inferior nature. He claims that he "had been there ever since the World was made, for he having never had a Woman to tempt him to sin, never dyed" (*NP* 146). However, he does not mention Eve, but similar to Speght and Lanyer places the blame primarily on Adam. He states that his brother "*Adam* transplanted Men from Earth by his sin, as some to Heaven, some to Hell, so I will transplant the World from Earth to Glass, for that is the last act of Chymistry" (*NP* 147). By claiming that it was Adam that altered the world, Cavendish is establishing Adam as the primary transgressor, thereby reversing the rationale that understands gender in terms of Adam and Eve. Yet, the creation story becomes disrupted even more as we learn that although the brother of Adam never had a woman to tempt him, like his brother, he will effectively change or destroy the world anyway by turning it to glass. This destruction will occur without the assistance of a 'wicked' or 'morally weak' woman. Destruction and change will occur with regardless of the influence of women, questioning patriarchal assumptions by ultimately redefining Eve's role in the fall.

VII. Natural Witchcraft

As Cavendish reconceptualizes the roles of Adam and Eve in relation to women's perceived inclination towards sin, it may seem strange that a satanic female witch features in *The Traveling Spirit*. The story serves as a key to understanding how concepts such as witchcraft and magic are explained in the Cavendish universe. *The Traveling Spirit* begins with a man seeking a witch in order to obtain knowledge. He explains that he has a "curiosity to travel" and "would go into those Countryes, which, without your power to assist me, I cannot do" (*NP* 144). The witch specifically defines herself as satanic, stating that she has a "great Master the Devil" (*NP* 144). In traditional understandings of witchcraft, witches supernaturally flew to their sabbat at night where they generally danced obscenely, ate newborn babies and indulged in huge sexual orgies.[48] However, this is not the sort of knowledge that the witch offers. In a very non-sensational manner, there is in fact no flying, baby eating, or orgies of any kind. There is also no contact with the devil or demonic familiars which was particularly frequent in English witchcraft trials.[49] Rather than incantations, charms, spells or any type of recourse to the supernatural, the witch simply gives the man opium, a natural plant. The common story of the witch is turned upside down. The man requests to be taken to a country by supernatural means, yet the witch's form of travel is not supernatural, but completely material,

[48] James Sharpe 59. Although flights to the sabbat were common in continental understandings of witchcraft in England, it was much less of a focus. Nonetheless, not only did Cavendish live in France and Belgium for seventeen years and would have been acquainted with continental traditions, but flights to the sabbat were not unknown in England and still occasionally emerged in English trials. See Ibid. 12.

[49] Ibid. 62-63.

consisting of a natural drug derived from poppies. As a result, the witch's magic is explainable in material and natural terms.

Witches also appear in the poem *Witches of Lapland* in *Poems and Fancies*. The poem declares that all wind derives from Lapland witches.

> Lapland is the place from whence all *Wind* come,
> From *Witches*, not from *Caves*, as doe think some.
> For they the *Aire* doe draw into high Hills,
> And beat them out againe by certaine *Mills*:
> Then sack it up, and sell it out for gaine
> To *Mariners*, which traffick on the *maine* (*PF* 157)

This particular witchcraft is simply the use of windmills; as in *The Traveling Spirit*, it is a natural force. Their knowledge appears mysterious or supernatural from those who do not understand their lore. Even hard work can appear as magic; "For industry is a kinde of witch-craft; for wise industry will bring that to passe, as one would think it were impossible" (*TWO* 41). Witchcraft is that which is what appears impossible in Nature, but which can nonetheless be explained in material terms.

Although Cavendish argues that supernatural witchcraft is merely a misunderstanding of natural mysteries, she nonetheless demonstrates an interest in witchcraft in her philosophy. She even theorizes that there is a "Natural Witchcraft" which is the enigmatic workings of Nature (*PL* 298). Since events are

> sometimes unusual and strange to us, we not knowing their causes, (For what Creature knows all motions in Nature, and their ways.) do stand amazed at their working power; and by reason we cannot assign any Natural cause for them, are apt to ascribe their effects to the Devil (*PL* 298)

People tend to demonize things they cannot understand. Since humanity will never be able to fully comprehend the natural world, the mysteries of Nature can induce fear and awe. However, this does not indicate that 'Natural Witchcraft' is diabolical or even immaterial. Natural magic only appears immaterial because of our ignorance.

Yet, magic in many respects is still an appropriate name for the mysterious and infinitely powerful natural world. Indeed, the eternal qualities of Nature are so complex and powerful that she could almost be perceived as a Magician.

> I believe natural Magick to be natural corporeal motions in natural bodies: Not that I say, Nature in her self is a Magicianess, but it may be called natural Magick or Witchcraft, meerly in respect to our Ignorance; for though Nature is old, yet she is not a Witch, but a grave, wise, methodical Matron, ordering her Infinite family (*PL* 302)

Though witches were often seen as the antithesis of feminine behavior, Nature is a matron, a motherly figure who manages domestic, familial affairs. Her magic is not chaos or evil, but the embodiment of order and wisdom. Though she is portrayed within a domestic space, performing domestic roles, she is the ultimate matriarch representing female authority as a good, orderly and natural force. Her natural witchcraft is *necessary* for order and the everyday functioning of Nature, however mysterious it may appear from our limited perspective.

This unorthodox, secular interpretation of witchcraft is further explored in *The Traveling Spirit*. The Devil does not seem to have any direct ability to give the witch immaterial power. When the man asks her to take him to Hell she is unable to oblige.

> Truly, said the Witch, I am but a Servant extraordinary, and have no power to go to my Masters Kingdome untill I dye; allthough the Way be broad and plain, and the Guides sure; so that I am but his Factor to do him service on the Earth (*NP* 145)

Although the witch claims to do service for the Devil on earth, she actually has no power to guide an individual to hell. Taken literally, this would indicate that she simply could not travel there while alive. Yet, indirectly and controversially, it could also suggest that if one follows witches, one will not be damned.

The witch's power is not only natural, demonstrating Cavendish's philosophy, but this is not an unusual path for the witch to explore. The pair were saved from danger and perils within the earth because "she, being vers'd, and knew the way well" (*NP* 146). The witch is well acquainted with knowledge of Nature and the earth, rather than supernatural and demonic power. At the end of the story, the man apparently pays no price for the knowledge gained from the witch nor does he seem tainted by the experience: "he found his Body where he left it, so putting on the Body as a Garment, gave thanks to the Witch, and then went home to rest his weary Spirits" (*NP* 148). Rather than a weak woman influenced by satanic powers, this witch is merely someone who understands more about the natural world; she is a wise woman.

VIII. Humans, Animals and Platonic Forms

Through her knowledge of Nature, the witch and the man are able to travel to the center of the earth, where she teaches him about various aspects of natural phenomenon. As they pass by seas of blood, the man initially assumes that it is human blood as he asks "where was the Blood of other Creatures, as Beasts, Birds, Fish, and the like?" The witch corrects him with her explanation that it is mixed "amongst the Blood of Men" for "the Earth knows no difference" (*NP* 146). The blood of animals is indiscriminately mixed with humans. Not only blood, but their bodies are also intermixed without distinction since there are "monstrous great and high Mountains of the Bones of Men and Beasts, which lay alltogether with one another" (*NP* 145). The distinction is not species, but types of death. The seas

contain the blood of either violent deaths or "those that dyed in peace," suggesting an equality in nature since the earth does not distinguish between beasts, humans, birds and fish (*NP* 146). The passage is even more revealing in context of seventeenth-century conceptions of medicine. Bodies were understood to be composed of the four humors; phlegm, yellow bile, black bile and blood. Thus, blood was crucial to early modern conceptions of the body. For example, the reproductive process depended on the transmutation of blood into seed.[50] If blood is fundamental for reproduction, then the passage is suggesting that the seeds of both animals and humans are mixed. As in Cavendish's scientific thought, all creatures are composed and generated from the same basic substance from "which all other Creatures are made or produced, which Principle is but one, viz. Matter, which makes all effects or Creatures of Nature to be material" (*OUEP* sig. 2F2r). Not only are all aspects of Nature generated from the same basic principle, matter, but creatures rarely return to their previous figure or species.

> there is not any action, or motion, or figure, in Nature, but may be repeated, that is, may return to its former Figure, when it is altered and dissolved; But by reason Nature delights in variety, repetitions are not so frequently made (*PL* 34)

After death, a man's body would transform into another form. Since all of matter is alive with knowledge and reason, this would indicate that such a man could be dissolved into animals, vegetables or even a woman, blurring the boundaries and distinctions between categories that define what it meant to be human. Hierarchical categories are particularly problematic in this context. How can one individual argue superiority when after death they will potentially become what is defined as inferior,

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[50] Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New

particularly if the 'divine' human soul is literally a no-thing or nonexistent? As the blood of animals and humans combine, transmuting into reproductive seeds, it is not reason or soul which defines humans, but their similarities and equality with other creatures.

As the witch and the man go further towards the center of the earth, they reach the storehouse of Nature where there are "the shapes and substances of all kinds of Fruits and Flowers, Trees, or any other Vegetables" (*NP* 146). These shapes and figures parallel Cavendish's description of forms in Nature. Cavendish envisions Nature having eternal forms for the "Infinite figures are the Infinite Forms of Nature" (*TPPO* 94). Yet these forms are entirely material since "the matter that was the cause of those figures hath an eternal being" and thus "Nature may Repeat one and the same Creature as she pleases" (*TPPO* 108, 106). If all creatures are made from the same substance, matter, than there needs to be some kind of knowledge or pattern which places creatures into similar, repeating figures or distinct species. These patterns would be Nature's forms, a knowledge intrinsic within matter; for "if a Man can draw the Picture of a man, or any thing else, although he never draws it, yet the Art is inherent in the Man, and the Picture in the Art" (*TPPO* 94). Though Cavendish argues that forms are part of the material world, she claims that different types or species still maintain differences amongst individuals because the motions in matter sometimes "seem Lasie at the beginning of Creation, or Idle in the midst of their Works, or seem Tired before the finishing of a creature" (*TPPO* 248). Thus, no creature ever reaches perfection.

Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 22.

Cavendish's forms in some respects resemble Platonic forms, yet the underlying ideology is vastly different. James R. Jacob summarizes Plato's forms as part of a dualistic and hierarchical system where there are two levels of existence.

> there are two levels of existence, or kinds of being, perfect and imperfect, changeless and transitory. The higher level is the real world of forms or essences, while this lower level we live in and experience is no more than a pale copy. The perfect forms offer a nonspatial, immaterial, eternal, purely intelligible template from which this perceptible world of material objects, ever subject to change, can be drawn. For every such object, there is a form or principle from which it derives its structure and to which it more or less conforms[51]

Although Cavendish envisioned Nature having forms, unlike Plato, they are not part of a superior, ghostly or heavenly reality, but are material objects. Jacqueline Broad argues that Cavendish's stance is ultimately anti-dualist and though she appropriates Platonist ideas, she collapses the theoretical foundations of neo-platonic binaries.

In reversing Plato's ideal forms, Cavendish is also challenging gendered dualism. According to Plato, forms are pure intellect, order and reason, opposed to the inferior world of senses and opinions; forms exist "in order moving according to reason."[52] In hermetic thought, platonic forms are not only superior knowledge, but are the epitome of intellect and reason. Anything arising from reason alone, such as abstract definitions or mathematics, is part of this superior, intelligible world, opposed to body and inferior copies or delusions. Accordingly, reason and mathematics are also closer to God. This dichotomy of a heavenly reality of ideal forms and pure knowledge diametrically opposed to body and senses is collapsed as Cavendish argues that "whatsoever is in Nature, has as much a being as the Mind" (*PL* 34). Appropriately, in *The Traveling Spirit*, Cavendish's forms do not appear to

be pure embodiments of true knowledge, opposed to false opinions and corporeal senses, but are part of the physical world. Thus, Nature and the body are not obstacles to reason and it is the exploration of natural, material phenomena which brings an individual to knowledge.[53]

IX. Plato Within the World of Cavendish

As Cavendish explores aspects of hermetic thought, the focus upon traveling spirits is appropriate since the neo-platonists theorized that souls could travel. Yet, Cavendish criticizes this belief in *Philosophical Letters* as she argues that

> the natural soul is not like a Traveller, going out of one body into another, neither is air her lodging; for certainly, if the natural humane soul should travel through the airy regions, she would at last grow weary, it being so great a journey, except she did meet with the soul of a Horse, and so ease her self with riding on Horseback. (*PL* 218)

As she playfully satirizes the theory of traveling souls, it seems strange that she has devoted an entire story to this concept. Indeed, *The Traveling Spirit* initially appears to have many inconsistent overlaps between hermetic science and her own thought. However, Broad argues that Cavendish's theoretical position is surprisingly shaped in response to the hermetic Cambridge Platonists, and especially Henry More.[54] Like

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[51] James R. Jacob, *The Scientific Revolution: Aspirations and Achievements, 1500-1700* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1988) 2.

[52] Plato, *The Republic*, Trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: The Colonial Press, 1901) 195.

[53] Cavendish further comically critiques Plato's argument that claims an individual is wide awake if they are "able to distinguish the idea from the objects" or are able to perceive the ideal forms from a grosser reality (Ibid. 170). According to Cavendish, they are not awake, they are simply on a hallucinogenic drug, opium.

[54] Ibid. 36. Other critics have also begun to explore the strange link between More and Cavendish. Sarah Hutton argues that Cavendish's Nature proves a material universe that is the direct opposite of More's philosophy and Katie Whitaker demonstrates how Cavendish responds to More's emphasis upon immateriality. See Sarah Hutton, "Margaret Cavendish and Henry More," *A Princely Brave*

the hermetic scientists, Cavendish explicitly rejects mechanist explanations of the world and theorizes a world that is filled with soul. Both Cavendish and the neo-platonists also defended the view that animals have capacity for sense and reason.[55] Broad argues that though Cavendish critiques More, she takes his "method to its logical extreme, to develop a full-bodied monist theory in which the entire natural world possesses intelligence, and the soul is material and extended."[56] Although Cavendish is often most hostile towards the hermetic scientists and her materialist theories directly contrasts with their emphasis upon spirituality, she does appropriate some of their ideas while simultaneously satirizing them. For example, Cavendish examines More's theory that the soul is extended and dividable, arguing that this is the same as stating the soul is material.[57] As a result, Cavendish develops a materialist philosophy fundamentally using concepts from hermetic science. From this context, *The Traveling Spirit* increasingly appears to be a journey through a hybrid world of Cavendish's philosophy intermixed with neo-platonic conceptions. Kate Lilley argues that Cavendish often demonstrates "an abiding fascination with kinds as such, and particularly impure and unexpected hybrids."[58] Hence, a secular philosophy intermixed with a science which is primarily based upon spirit would not necessarily be an unusual mode of inquiry for someone who characteristically focuses upon hybridization. Yet, how could a science that is heavily based upon the existence of spirits compliment a materialist and possibly atheist epistemology?

Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish, ed. Stephen Clucas (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003) 185-198 and Whitaker 322- 323.

[55] Broad 36.

[56] Ibid. 36.

[57] Ibid. 61.

[58] Kate Lilley, Introduction, *Margaret Cavendish: The Blazing World and Other Writings,* ed. Kate Lilly (London: Penguin Classics, 1994) xi.

In *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* Cavendish argues that "all thoughts have not onely a being, but a material being in Nature; nay, even the Thought of the existence of a Deity, although Deity it self is Immaterial" (*OUEP sig. 2Cc2v*). If thoughts themselves are material, with an independent existence from the thinker, then thoughts of God and other spiritual concepts are part of the material side of the material/immaterial binary. Thoughts of the divine would not bring you closer to divinity, but would surprisingly become fully embodied, independent creatures themselves. This directly contrasts with the tenets of neo-platonist thinking. In fact Plato argued that knowledge of immaterial forms brings an individual to a higher state of consciousness opposed to thoughts. Only knowledge of

> being and of the unseen can make the soul look upward, and whether a man gapes at the heavens or blinks on the ground, seeking to learn some particular of sense, I would deny that he can learn, for nothing of that sort is matter of science; his soul is looking downward, not upward[59]

Though Plato believes that there can be no learning from the physical world, Cavendish argues that the thought of heavens, ideal forms or even God are as material as any other subject. Thoughts of the divine would be as utterly material as any other aspect of Nature. Hence, hermetic theories regarding spirits, souls and witches would actually exist within Cavendish's philosophy, yet not as the neo-platonists believed, but as tangible, material objects worthy of study as natural objects.

Cavendish explores and critiques the magical tradition from multiple layers and angles. Even the direction of travel that the witch and the man embark upon is significant within this densely metaphored story. Plato argues that those who can

[59] Plato 226.

perceive ideal forms, "their souls are ever hastening into the upper world where they desire to dwell."[60] However, the man and the witch travel downward far into earth, into knowledge of Nature, rather than to an upper, ghostly world. Plato uses the analogy of a dark cave to illustrate the difference between the world of appearance and the world of ultimate reality of ideal forms. If an individual had only known a cave, he or she would think that false shadows were reality and only by leaving the cave would the person see light and understand truth. Likewise, if a person never perceives ideal forms, they live in darkness. Ironically, Cavendish's forms are in a cave-like setting, deep in the earth. The forms do not lead the soul to light, but descend the pair into darkness where the only light was from "Glow-worms" (*NP* 146). Natural creatures of the earth provide light and perception, rather than immaterial knowledge. Furthermore, to perceive Adam's brother, who also claims to be an alchemist, the man and the witch were required to travel into a space so minute that it caused immense pain; perhaps satirizing the neo-platonic scientists, since to gain the knowledge of their science, they had to go into the darkest, deepest and narrowest parts of the earth, a place more narrow and dark than Plato's cave.

X. The Alchemist

As the man and the witch converse with the enigmatic elderly man in the center of the earth, he states that he has been alive since the beginning of the world. Though he is somewhat inert, he also claims to have a power and connection to all things.

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[60] Ibid.

> and although he could never reshy [*sic]* move out of that place, yet he had the power to call all things on the Earth unto him by degrees, and to dispose of them as he would (*NP* 146)

This strange man appears to be the embodiment of the platonic doctrine of the world soul.[61] Henry More describes this concept as the Spirit of Nature which governs every individual part of the natural world.[62] Thus, matter would still be passive and governed by a male force in this theory. Though Cavendish argues Nature is not passive, it would still be consistent within her science for the world to have a soul of its own since "every material part has a material natural soul" (*TBW* 176). Though the world soul may have influence over this world, it would nonetheless be only a small fragment within the whole of Nature since there are multiple worlds within worlds for "this World is onely a part of Nature, or Natural Matter, and there may be more and Infinite worlds besides" (*PL* 460).

The hermetic concept of the world soul is redefined to fit within Cavendish's materialist theories of multiple, soulified worlds. He serves as an apparatus to reconceptualize the magical sciences. He not only has a connection to everything in the world, he claims to be the only true alchemist. He argues he is the only one because alchemy cannot be understood in one human lifetime, but will take many ages of time to master.

> tis not one nor two Ages will do it, but there must be many Ages to bring it to perfection: but I, said he, living long, and observing the course of Nature strictly, and much, I am arrived to the height of that Art; for all the Gold that is digged out of the Mines was converted by me (*NP* 147).

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[61] Shapin describes the world soul as "the notion that matter was imbued with life and the associated identification of God and nature. Such doctrines gave legitimacy to magical beliefs and practices" (Shapin 43).

[62] Broad 56.

What the elder man calls chemistry is actually the works of Nature. Though he claims he can transmute Gold, other alchemists would not be able to achieve this skill in their life. Indeed, unlike the alchemists, who were attempting to create synthetic materials to reach a God-like status, the elder man describes his chemistry in natural terms; "As for my Stills, said he, they are the Pores of the Earth; and the Waters I distill" (*NP* 147). Thus his instruments for distilling are not synthetic, but are the pores of the earth and the distilled substance itself is water, a natural element. Other natural phenomena are also explained as acts of chemistry; "the saltness of the Sea comes from Chymistry; and the Vapour that arises from the Earth, is the Smoke that steems from my Stills" (*NP* 147). As with witchcraft, the mysteries of alchemy are actually the material, yet enigmatic powers of Nature.

The Traveling Spirit demonstrates Cavendish's deep interest in platonic philosophy. However, all of the basic foundations of hermetic thought are deconstructed to fit into the parameters of materialism. Since the spirit of nature describes natural processes of the world as chemistry, Cavendish is indicating that alchemists will never master or usurp the forces of Nature in their quest for occult powers. The spirit of nature is not a superior male force embodying intellect, while governing a passive Nature devoid of reason. Rather, the spirit is only one small part that is governed by an infinitely intelligent and powerful female body.

Yet, it is not just alchemy, but hermetic science in general is continually turned upside down throughout the story from various perspectives. Rather than the witch having supernatural powers (satanic or immaterial), her magic is natural. Witches are not trying to master humans, but it is the alchemist who is attempting to turn the entire world into glass. Ironically it is the alchemist or the hermetic

philosophers who are the threat to humanity, rather than the witch. *The Traveling Spirit* is a complex, multi-layered exploration of hermetic science and witchcraft placed within Cavendish's animistic materialism, demonstrating how concepts that are defined against each other, such as immaterial/material are not necessarily polarized opposites, but are often similar principles. Therefore though the neo-platonists may at first appear to be in direct opposition to Cavendish, she demonstrates how binaries are merely an interpretation of reality by incorporating and connecting their science into her own. Destabilizing dualistic categories also demonstrates her belief that all aspects of the world have a valid knowledge, even when it appears distinct or contradictory to her own theories.

Though Cavendish's science can appear inconsistent, when understood as conforming to a commitment to redefine binary oppositions, such as spirit opposed to material, there is a definite method underlying her seemingly idiosyncratic, diverse and contradictory approach. Since all aspects of Nature have their own specific knowledge and valid perspective, then being open to all forms of intellectual thought, regardless if they are contradictory, is the best way to discover knowledge. For example, in *The Blazing World*, Cavendish sounds like the hermetic magician John Dee himself as she argues "the best informers are the immaterial spirits" (*TBW* 184).[63] Since they are the best informers, she is not entirely discrediting hermetic science, but appropriating their ideas into her own thought.[64] Examining all sciences would consequently be the most appropriate method for understanding an infinite body of Nature.

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[63] John Dee believed that "angelic intercourse was not only a possibility but the ultimate goal of magical activity" (Hunter 29).

XI. Science and the Kingdom of Fairies

Although *The Traveling Spirit* is an exploration of hermetic science, the story strangely bears a striking resemblance to the fairy kingdom described in *Poems and Fancies*. Like *The Traveling Spirit*, the kingdom of fairies is also located "in the circled center of the Earth" where glowworms are the source of light; "*Glow-worms* for candles are light up" (*PF* 153). Not only do both texts share the same location and use of glowworms, in the center of the kingdom is also a "Store-house rich of Nature sweet" (*PF* 155), paralleling the forms which are held in the storehouse of Nature in *The Traveling Spirit*. More strikingly, there is also an "*old man* that doth i'th Center dwell" (*PF* 150). However, he is not depicted as an alchemist, but a "*Smith set at the forge below*" (*PF* 150). Mirroring the elderly man in *The Traveling Spirit*, both characters are described as creating mines in the earth.

> *Nature* her *mettal* makes him hammer out,
> All that she sends through *Mines* the *world* about (*PF* 150).

The parallels between the two stories are too great to ignore. Yet, one is about neo-platonic science and the other is about a fairy kingdom. How could these two seemingly different worlds be defined as the same thing? In order to comprehend the link between fairies and neo-platonic science, it would be helpful to clarify early modern understandings of fairies.

In contemporary times, fairies are regarded as small, benevolent creatures that are consigned to children's stories. James Sharp argues that this "was not the case in

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[64] As argued in previous chapters, though these spirits are referred to as 'immaterial', Cavendish

early modern England, where there was a powerful folklore which saw fairies as active, frequently mischievous and sometimes malevolent beings."[65] Yet, they were not always seen as entirely malevolent or evil, many village wizards or good witches, who were known as cunning folk, claimed to be in touch with the fairies.[66] However, though they could be conceived as sometimes being benevolent, there were many overlaps between witch and fairy beliefs and those who claimed to be in contact with fairies could be attacked by authorities who argued that such contact was consorting with the devil.[67] For example, in Yorkshire, 'fairy-taken' was synonymous with being bewitched.[68]

The link between the world in *The Traveling Spirit* and the fairy kingdom appears less incongruous in context of early modern conceptions of fairies and their associations with witchcraft. As the witch guides the man to the center of the earth she is practicing natural witchcraft that leads to the kingdom of fairies. The witch is well versed on the route and knew much of their kingdom, demonstrating that witchcraft and fairies are ideas that are connected to one another. Even More and Glanvill did not limit their exploration of the supernatural to witches. Both believed that in order to support the truth of Christian religion, it was essential to establish the truth of not only witches, but of ghosts and fairies.[69]

Fairies also are defined in similar terms to witches in Cavendish's philosophy. Both are natural, material creatures which humanity interprets to be supernatural.

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fundamentally describes them as material creatures.
[65] James Sharp 58.
[66] Ibid. 58.
[67] Valletta 79.
[68] James Sharp 58.

> *although not subject to our sense, then wee must grant, that substance must have some forme; And why not of man, as of any thing else? and why not rational soules live in a small body, as well as in a grosse, and in a thin, as in a thicke?* Shall we say Dwarfes have lesse soules, because lesse, or thinner bodies? And if rational souls, why not saving souls? So there is no reason in Nature, but that there may not onely be such things as Fairies, but these be as deare to God as we (*PF* sigs. Aa2r, Aa2v).

If entities as small as atoms have life and knowledge, than there could be a multitude of other creatures that are so small or large that they are beyond human understanding. Size and shape do not determine significance or reason in material creatures. Fairies are consequently not diabolical, but are just as important to God as humans. Fairies and witchcraft are part of an infinite, yet material world which is difficult or even impossible for us to understand.

Fairies are not just fictional creatures within Cavendish's poetry, they are also a significant facet of her scientific thought. In *Philosophical Letters* she not only affirms her belief in fairies, but also refers the reader back to her previous work, *Poems and Fancies*, to better understand them. Although Cavendish writes much about fairies, contemporary scholarship has not attempted to explain the function of fairies in her work. Not only do they reside near the storehouse of Nature, but they also seem to have a close connection with Nature since the queen of the fairies is "in *Natures grace*" (*PF* 150) and is given a sort of governing position.

> There *Mab* is Queen of all, by *Natures* will,
> And by *her* favour she doth governe still (*PF* 150)

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[69] See Whitaker 322, 323.

Though Mab is often queen of the fairies in English folklore, Cavendish claims she is also in favor with Nature and even governs the elderly man, the neo-platonic world soul.[70]

The fairies in *Poems and Fancies* not only exist in the center of the earth, but they are also part of the human body where *The City of the Fairies* is described as physical parts of the brain (*PF* 163).

> The *City* is the *Braine*, incompast in
> Double walls (*Dura Mater, Pia Mater thin*)
> It's trenched round about with a thick scull,
> And fac'd without with wondrous Art, and skill.
> The *Fore-head* is the *fort*, that's builded high,
> And for the *Sentinels* is either *Eye* (*PF* 163)

Since their city is the corporeal parts of the head, fairies actually reside in human bodies. Fairies also influence thoughts, memory, visions and dreams since "Those formes and figures, we for fancy take. And when we sleep, those Visions, dreames we call" and "the place where Memory doth lye in, Is the great Magazine of Oberon King." Indeed, fairies resemble Cavendish's description of the rational part of matter which produces "Conception, Imagination, Fancy, Memory, Remembrance, Understanding, Judgment, Knowledg, and all the Passions" (*PL* 36). Although most seventeenth-century science did not believe imagination was physical, Cavendish argues "Thoughts, Ideas, Conceptions" are "all Material". Hence, ideas, memory and thoughts are entirely corporeal within the Cavendish paradigm (*PL* 12).

Since fairies influence thoughts, memory, visions and dreams, the mind is affected by these entities, creating a conception of self that is not insular or stable.

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[70] She is "called Queen Mab in English folklore, the queen of the fairies. Mab is a mischievous but basically benevolent figure. In William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, she is referred to as the fairies' midwife, who delivers sleeping men of their innermost wishes in the form of dreams" ("Mab,"

Humanity is not separate from such creatures, but fairies are an intrinsic part of the self. The self is not whole, complete or united, but is filled with living creatures with their own free-will. Perhaps this is why she depicts a war between the fairies and the pygmies, demonstrating her belief that there can be a "war in the thoughts of the Reader" (*PL* 254)

Unlike God, devils, angels and the divine soul, thoughts are not located in the immaterial side of the binary and consequently, are not 'no-things' or nonexistent in the physical world.

> those Fancies and Imaginations are not No-things, but as perfectly imbodied as any other Creatures; but by reason, they are not so grosly imbodied, as those creatures that are composed of more sensitive and inanimate matter, man thinks or believes them to be no bodies; but were they substanceless figures, he could not have them in his mind or thoughts (*PL* 448)

Though we cannot discern the physical aspect of the imagination, Cavendish argues that it is nonetheless a physical creature. She suggests that perhaps we cannot perceive it because the imagination is not as heavily embodied as other parts of Nature. Since rational matter is not always "to be perceptible by our grosser senses" than thoughts would be material, yet more difficult for us to discern (*PL* 417). Paralleling the description of matter, fairies are also not easily perceived. "As for Faires, I will not say, but there may be such Creatures in Nature, and have airy bodies, and be of a humane shape, and have humane actions" (*PL* 227). Since both rational matter and fairies are not always perceptible to humanity and are associated with thoughts, Cavendish's fairies can be understood as personifications of the rational part of matter.

Encyclopædia Britannica Online (Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2005). 12 March 2005, http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=9049588&query=mab&ct).

If fairies are an anthropomorphic description of rational matter, this does not mean that she is contradicting her opposition to binaries. Although Cavendish does set up distinctions in matter, inanimate and animate matter, she collapses the dualism between them since they are so intermixed that they cannot ever be separated or understood as distinct.

> we canot assign a certain seat or place to the rational, another to the sensitive, and another to the inanimate, but they are diffused and intermixt throughout all the body; And this is the reason, that sense and knowledg cannot be bound onely to the head or brain: But although they are mixt together, nevertheless they do not lose their interior natures by this mixture (*PL* 111).

Although she emphasizes numerous times that no part of Nature whether it is as small as an atom is without both animate and inanimate matter, Cavendish still retains a distinction between them.

XII. Liminal Boundary Walkers

Considering Cavendish's anti-dualistic stance, it would be appropriate that she would use fairies as an analogy for rational matter. Fairies are seemingly mysterious and magical, but to Cavendish they instead demonstrate the infinite quality and diversity of the natural world. Like Cavendish's conception of Nature that cannot be fully comprehended, categorized or mastered, fairies were also an unstable category. Fairies tended to exist in areas that are distinguished by being nameless, unmapped, uncharted, and above all unowned.[71] Diane Purkiss argues that

> They are encountered on boundaries, either in space - between town and wilderness - or in time - at midday, at midnight, at the change of the year, on

[71] See Diane Purkiss, *Troublesome Things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2000) 151.

> the eve of a feast, on Halloween or May Eve, in a festive space marked out from normal life[72]

Fairies could also be encountered during moments of physical or social transition such as birth, adolescence, loss of virginity, marriage, death and burial. Sometimes they were understood as dead relatives, demonstrating that they were both foreign and familiar, dead, yet alive, unable to be placed in one fixed category.[73] Appropriate to fairies' unstable ontological Nature, the early modern populace did not 'believe' in fairies, yet they also did not disbelieve.[74] "Fairies both are and are not," they are "liminal boundary walkers."[75]

The fairies fluid, non-definable ontological status render them appropriate personifications for a philosophy that consistently destabilizes categories and boundaries. Cavendish's science believes all theories and ideologies, yet disbelieves at the same time. She is atheist, yet believes in God, she is a materialist, yet all of matter has soul. Like fairies, her science exists on both sides of boundaries.

Another parallel between Cavendish's theoretical thought and the meaning of fairies is that both are deeply connected to Nature. Fairies legends are generally linked to features of a known landscape.[76] Similar to Cavendish's Queen Mab, they

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[72] Dianne Purkiss, "Sounds of Silence: Fairies and Incest in Scottish Witchcraft Stories," *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Stuart Clark (Houndsmills: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2001) 83. Though Purkiss is specifically discussing fairies in Scotland, their liminal status can be perceived in England. See Purkiss, *Troublesome Things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories*.

[73] Ibid. Katharine M. Briggs also argues that the association between the fairies and the dead is often very close in folk tradition. See Katharine M. Briggs, *The Vanishing People: A Study of Traditional Fairy Beliefs* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1978) 24, 25.

[74] Purkiss argues that the ontological instability of fairies made them a suitable medium for explaining the trauma of incest. For a more in depth discussion of this see Purkiss, "Sounds of Silence: Fairies and Incest in Scottish Witchcraft Stories," 81-98.

[75] Ibid. 84.

[76] Ibid. 85.

are intrinsically bound with the natural world. As in Cavendish's understanding of Nature, fairies do not represent good or evil.

> they may be evil, dealing death or sickness to every man and creature they pass on their way, like the Sluagh of the Highlands; they may steal unchurched wives from child-bed, or snatch away unchristened babies leaving animated stocks or sickly children of their own in their place, or they may be harmless and even beneficial-fertility spirits watching over the growth of flowers or bringing good luck to herds or children.[77]

Though fairies were associated with witchcraft, they were not entirely perceived as malevolent since many holy people such as healers and good witches claimed to communicate with such entities. Just as nature contains no entities that are pure evil or good, fairies were also both malevolent and benevolent, mirroring the diverse and powerful qualities of the forces of the natural world. Meeting a fairy can be risky, dangerous or helpful, just as Nature can be beautiful, powerful and dangerous.

Parallels with fairies and Cavendish's Nature can also be drawn in relation to the early modern status of witchcraft since they are both associated with femininity. Fairy legends often focus upon women's concerns such as childbirth, babies, caring for the sick and dead.[78] Stories of human women becoming midwives to the fairies were widespread in England and house fairies occupied traditional female work spaces performing domestic chores.[79] Though men experienced fairies as well as women, Purkiss argues that many standard stories about men's encounters with fairies, and particularly with the Fairy Queen, reflect a sense that the man is entering a realm that is not his own, a woman's world.[80]

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[77] Briggs 39.
[78] Purkiss, *Troublesome Things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories*.
[79] Briggs, 53 and 93.
[80] Purkiss, *Troublesome Things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories*, 133, 134.

Fairies also inhabit feminine spaces in the sense that their status mirrors that of women.[81] They are outsiders, yet also familiar; they were neighbors, yet alien and sometimes even appeared as deceased relatives. Women were also boundary walkers and outsiders - they were part of families, yet since they became part of their husband's, they were not fully part of their own; they were not full subjects, yet were subject to the laws of the land. Like fairies, women were closer to Nature and further from God. Both are the ultimate symbol of otherness. Perhaps this is why Cavendish defines Nature as female with mythical 'feminine' entities to personify unstable matter that exists beyond the boundaries of comprehension.

Nature and fairies also represent life. An egg is a common ingredient in fairy magic as it symbolizes birth and hidden life.[82] Like fairy magic, there is hidden life in matter which is always creating and giving birth. This is natural witchcraft. Both fairies and Cavendish's science exceed the terms of what is likely, acceptable or sayable in society. Fairies are thus appropriate creatures to voice heretical science. Matter is alive, mysterious, beyond expression, functioning beyond boundaries, binaries and human definition.

In *Poems and Fancies*, Cavendish claims that characters in the fairy kingdom are often mistaken for Gods.

> She *Proserpine*, that's thought the *Queen* of hell.
> Yet *Venus* is a *Tinkers wife*, we see,
> Not a *goddesse*, as she was thought to be;
> When all the world to her did offerings bring,
> And her high praise in prose, and verse did sing;
> And *Priests* in orders, on her Altars tend,
> And to *her Image* all the wise heads bend.
> But to vain wayes that *men* did go,

[81] Purkiss, "Sounds of Silence: Fairies and Incest in Scottish Witchcraft Stories," 85.
[82] Purkiss also argues that many fairy legends are vivid metaphors for the birth process. Ibid. 85-88.

To worship *gods* they do not know.
Tis true, her *sonne's a pretty Lad*,
And is a *Foot-boy* to *Queen Mab* (*PF* 150)

Venus and Persephone are the same entity. Though they are not goddesses, they are either fairies, or at least are intrinsically connected to the fairy kingdom. Cavendish's choice of deities is significant since she does not choose gods of the sea, forest, war, but instead chooses Persephone who "is thought to be the goddess of Hell" and Venus who is goddess of Love, reminding the reader of the Hell/Heaven love/hate, God/Satan associations. Providing another parallel between Venus and God, Cavendish also mentions Venus' son, the 'pretty lad' (*PF* 150). Like God, who is the father of Christ, Venus is also the parent of a deity, Cupid. If deities are actually fairies within Cavendish's understanding of nature, she is perhaps suggesting that all religious figures are mistaken for rational matter. Hermetic philosophers also believed that reason is God. Since fairies are rational matter, this theory is not disproving the neo-platonists. God is still reason, yet is not severed or defined against Nature or humanity. Rather than existing far away in the heavens or in abstract conceptions, God, like other religious and mythical figures, is rational matter, existing everywhere in the natural world for "the Sensitive and Rational [is] the Quintessence, Spirit" (*PPO sig.* b2r).

Considering Hunter's contention that it was necessary for early modern writers to imply unorthodox ideas rather than directly state them, Cavendish's enigmatic fairies are more comprehensible. Cavendish could not directly state that fairies and witches are not only Gods, but are an intrinsic material part of every human. All aspects of Nature would be God itself since everything is endowed with reason. Men are not closer to God and reason, but women and all other aspects of the

world are corporeal embodiments of God itself. The self is not only a fragment, connected to an infinite whole, but it is a divine self.

If every part of Nature is in a sense God, than every creature is consequently a physical form of worship; "all parts and creatures in nature do adore and worship God" (*PL* 139). Since every aspect of the material world is part of the body of God, than every action, every movement in the natural world is worship itself.

> That in their shapes and forms, what e're they be,
> And all their actions they may worship thee:
> For 'tis not onely Man that doth implore,
> But all [of Nature's] parts, Great God, do thee adore (*PL* 542)

Reverence is not confined to one type of religion or even humanity, but there is infinite worship. In many ways this demonstrates another parallel with radical sectarians. Both Cavendish and sectarians believe that God is personally within the individual. Human ceremonies, rituals and religious rites would not be more reverent or holy. However, Cavendish takes an even more radical stance. Worship not only can occur without the aid of ritual or church clergy, but it is a physical part of existence for all creatures. God is within every part of the material world and if even an atom is part of God, than God takes infinite forms and shapes within one person.

> I believe there is a general worship and adoration of God; for as God is an Infinite Deity, so certainly he has an Infinite Worship and Adoration (*PL* 139)

Since God is infinite, he must be venerated in infinite ways and if all creatures have life, soul and reason, than there are innumerable methods of legitimately worshipping God. No form of religion could claim truth and like sectarian thought, church hierarchy would be rendered unnecessary if every action and creature was legitimately venerating and embodying God in their own individual way.

In an epistemology that conceives every part of the natural world as being a form of worship and a part of the body of God/Nature, there could be no evil. How could a part of God possibly be deemed evil? In *The Blazing World* the spirits claim that "spirits could not commit actual evils" (*TBW* 176). This is not to say that Cavendish agrees with the hermetic emphasis upon harmony. Although no creature can commit evil, that does not mean that they do not harm others, for strife and change are also a basic tenet of her philosophy. For example, in a garden

> there are factions and divisions, which cause productions of mixed species; as for example, weeds, instead of sweet flowers and useful fruits; but gardeners and husbandmen use often to decide their quarrels, and cause them to agree, which though it shows a kindness to the differing parties, yet 'tis a great prejudice to the worms, and other animal creatures that live underground; for it most commonly causes their dissolution and ruin (*TBW* 153)

Though an action may be beneficial to some creatures, it may cause 'death' to other creatures. When the Empress asks whether good spirits may "be compared to the fowls of the air", the spirits claim that "there were many cruel and ravenous fowls as well in the air, as there were fierce and cruel beasts on earth; so that the good are always mixed with the bad" (*TBW* 176, 177). There is no good/evil binary and though every part of nature is god-like, it is also satan-like; like the gardeners unknowingly killing worms, it will simultaneously be harmful to others. The trope of the garden could indicate the garden of Eden, suggesting that even paradise would not be immune to the strife inherent in matter. Although strife and death are harmful to particular parts in Nature, it is necessary for other parts to live. As previously argued, war and peace, antipathies and sympathies in matter are also necessary for Nature to function. Good and bad are necessary for life to exist.

If women were more closely associated with the evil side of the good/evil binary, collapsing the dualism redefines man and woman in relation to God, challenging religious understandings of woman that placed her in an ideologically inferior position. The chasm between woman and God is closed as God is an intrinsic part of every creature. As Cavendish draws from various scientific, religious, folk and intellectual traditions, she develops a highly complex theory which believes all perspectives, yet simultaneously disbelieves. On the surface, Cavendish's work appears contradictory and idiosyncratic, yet her universe is a liminal space in which contradictions not only make sense, but are necessary since all parts of the material world are alive, God-like and equal. Like fairies, magic and witches, Nature is enigmatic, powerful and existing beyond comprehension and categorization. Cavendish redefines and blends binary notions of body/soul, death/life, mortality/immortality and human/animal, redefining and expanding the concept of physical reality while also challenging categories that maintain hierarchical categories. In order to conceptualize this liminal and highly unorthodox nature, it was necessary for Cavendish to create an uncharacteristic material/immaterial binary. Though it makes her work much more enigmatic for contemporary readers, it allows her to remain somewhat orthodox while giving her the freedom to depict and theorize a highly subversive philosophy where God does not exist, yet paradoxically God also lives in every part of the natural world. The next chapter further explores how such paradoxes and contradictions, created from the equality and free-will within matter, correspond to the political ideologies present with *The Blazing World.*

3

The Politics of Atoms, Multiple Worlds and Parallel Realities in *The Blazing World*

It has been assumed in most contemporary criticism that Cavendish was a loyal supporter of royalist politics. Many critics have focused upon Cavendish's supposed staunch royalist and dedication to hierarchy, some even suggesting that it invalidates her other political theories, particularly in relation to feminism. For example, Eve Keller argues that Cavendish's "gender critique vanishes before a non-critical engagement with the privileges and pleasures of her class."[1] This opinion parallels assertions from Lisa Sarasohn who also claims that Cavendish "fervently defended the superiority of monarchy and hierarchy, reflecting class rather than gender solidarity."[2] In contemporary criticism, she is routinely attacked for her conservative, royalist tenets and scholars such as Sara Mendelson have claimed that she "was not a true champion of her sex, but an egoist who happened to be of the female gender."[3] If her politics and feminism are merely opportunism or the desire for her own personal advancement and domination over others, then her philosophy is severely undermined. By suggesting that her theories are merely the product of egoism, rather than serious intellectual pursuits, scholars are catering to the 'Mad

[1] Eve Keller, "Producing Petty Gods: Margaret Cavendish's Critique of Experimental Science," *English Literary History* 64.2 (1997): 466.
[2] Lisa T. Sarasohn, "A Science Turned Upside Down: Feminism and the Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish," *Huntington Library Quarterly: A Journal for the History and Interpretation of English and American Civilisation* 47.4 (1984): 293.

Madge' approach to Cavendish, the interpretation that was common in early criticism (and still resonates in recent scholarship), where her literature was deemed crazy or irrational and was consequently not given an in depth literary analysis. Also, in dismissing Cavendish's political theories on the premise that contemporary readers do not agree with her politics, crucial cultural circumstances are overlooked which may in fact alter our understanding of not only her political sentiments, but her literature in general.

Although most critics agree that she was a conservative aristocrat defending class inequality, Catherine Gallagher points out that that it is an "odd but indisputable fact that the seventeenth-century women whom we think of as the forerunners and founders of feminism were, almost without exception, Tories."[4] Though the term Tory is not appropriate since it did not indicate conservative politics until the 1680's, well after Cavendish's lifetime, this nonetheless suggests that our understanding of many seventeenth-century feminists may be anachronistic.[5] The peculiar tie between proto-feminism and conservatism can be better understood through analyzing an author such as Cavendish who wrote extensively about both monarchy and gender inequality.

The critical emphasis upon Cavendish's staunch royalist position and dedication to hierarchy also becomes increasingly complicated and problematic when contextualized within seventeenth-century political ideology. Royalist arguments for

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[3] Sara Heller Mendelson, *The Mental World of Stuart Women: Three Studies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987) 55.

[4] Gallagher argues that this is particularly strange considering many aristocratic women were actually able to maintain the privileges of their rank within the context of Whig politics. See Catherine Gallagher, "Embracing the Absolute: Margaret Cavendish and the Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England," *Early Women Writers: 1600-1720*, ed. Anita Pacheco (London: Longman, 1998) 133, 134.

monarchy were generally founded upon religion. Nigel Smith argues that for those who advocated monarchical government, power was understood as deriving from God alone.

> For Royalists, the belief that the King corresponded on earth to God's power in heaven, thus discounting any claims to the original consent of the people in establishing monarchy, was as comprehensively substantiated as it was widespread, drawing on scriptural, rhetorical and logical resources to confirm itself[6]

Since a monarch's power was understood in religious terms and corresponded to God's ascendancy; power was not derived from the population at large, but above from God. Thus, religion and politics were intrinsically connected and a critique on religion would consequently be a commentary on politics; "all monarchical defense was a theology as much as it was a politics: religion mattered."[7]

Unlike many royalists, Cavendish does not use religion as a base to begin political theory. As argued in previous chapters, Cavendish's philosophy can be understood as a form of atheism and many critics have emphasized the secular or atheistic aspects of her thinking.[8] However, though royalist ideology and religion were intrinsic to each other and the atheistic bent to her thinking is thus unusual for a supporter of monarchy, there were more secular methods for justifying monarchy. A few conservative thinkers used contract theory and the secular language of

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[5] *OED* 279, 280.
[6] Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 100.
[7] Ibid. 114.
[8] See Stephen Clucas, "Margaret Cavendish and Cyrano De Bergerac: A Libertine Subtext for Cavendish's *Blazing World*," *BSEAA,* XVII-XVIII 54 (2002): 176, 177; Jay Stevenson, "Imagining the Mind: Cavendish's Hobbesian Allegories," *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish*, ed. Stephen Clucas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) 144; Sarasohn 177-211. Sarah Hutton also notes that "absent from Cavendish's critique of Hobbes are the standard charges of atheism founded on his materialism" (Sarah Hutton, "In Dialogue With Thomas Hobbes: Margaret Cavendish's Natural Philosophy," *Women's Writing* 4:3 (1997): 424).

republicanism to counter parliamentarian discourse on their own terms; to prove that even in the republican framework, monarchy was the best form of government.

In contrast to royalist ideology, republicans often grounded their beliefs from contractual theory that argued government derived from the consent of the commonwealth and not immediately from God; so both sovereign and subjects were bound by reciprocal conditions.[9] This limited the power of the sovereign and also demonstrated that humanity is naturally born with freedom from all subjection and is at liberty to choose what form of government it pleases.[10] Katharine Gillespie argues that altering the understanding from which authority is derived allowed a very different theoretical foundation for politics.

> As a founding principle, this radically transformed the terms upon which the authority of the ruler was predicated from a force that was commensurate with a higher, more preeminent law to one that was limited by that higher law because it flowed upward from the consent of the governed, each of whom was naturally empowered by their own status as an adult individual endowed with certain rights directly by God, rather than downward from God through a totem of patriarchal heads.[11]

If power does not disseminate downwards from God by way of a pre-eminent law, than not only republican, but other secular authors, regardless of their politics, would perceive the nature of authority in very different terms. In order to better understand Cavendish's political thought, it will be necessary to examine how she conceives the origins of power and authority. Exploring her theories in relation to another royalist,

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[9] See J.P. Sommerville, *Royalists & Patriots: Politics and Ideology in England, 1603-1640*, 2nd ed (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 1999) 79. By the 1650's, monarchical defenders were often compelled to take on the discourses of republicanism and popular politics, yet traditional arguments for monarchy gained momentum again after the 1660's. See Smith 114. However, Cavendish's secular attitude towards religion remains essentially the same during both Interregnum and Restoration.

[10] Katharine Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century: English Women's Writing and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 117.

[11] Ibid. 117.

yet secular thinker, will clarify not only her attitudes towards class hierarchy, but will facilitate an understanding of her political agenda.

I. Approaching Cavendish Through Hobbes

Many scholars have linked Cavendish with royalist, Thomas Hobbes and critic Anna Battigelli claims that Cavendish "absorbed his political thought, taking it to its logical extreme. In the end she was more of a Hobbesian than Hobbes."[12] Though monarchy and equality may seem incompatible, Hobbes appropriated the republican concept of equality arguing that because of the equality between people, the natural state of humanity "is a condition of Warre of every man against every man."[13] This brutal, war-like condition will always cause humans to strive for domination. Thus any form of political stability, regardless of what form it takes, is the most humane. Manipulation, coercion and fear should be utilized to create the most peaceful environment possible for a fierce and viscous humanity. Consequently, the most stable form of government would be one where the population was under complete submission of one individual will: the will of the monarch.

In many respects, Cavendish's depiction of the natural world mirrors Hobbes' portrayal of humanity. Like Hobbes, she also theorizes about equality and strife, yet argues that this idea applies to all natural phenomenon since there is "an infinite Equality in infinite Matter" (*PPO* 10) and that "infinit and eternal matter joyned all,

[12] Anna Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998) 83.
[13] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 96.

as to one is alwayes at strife in it self" (*TPPO* 41). Cavendish further argues that "all things turn with Self-ends; for certainly every thing hath Self-love" (*PPO* 194). Perhaps if everything has self-love, then the natural inclination of matter would be to seek absolute power. In this context, a monarch who suppresses the free-will of a population would seem to be the most stable and natural structure.

Cavendish's science fiction story, *The Blazing World* in many ways demonstrates a Hobbesian outlook upon human nature. The Empress seeks absolute power and submission in her world resembling Hobbes' claim that there is a "generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death."[14] Once the Empress secures domination in the Blazing World, she is not satisfied and continues to expand her domain by not only conquering and colonizing neighboring worlds, but using creative pursuits to obtain more power. This further mirrors Hobbes argument

> that Kings, whose power is greatest, turn their endeavours to the assuring it at home by Lawes, or abroad by Wars: and when that is done, there succeedeth a new desire; in some, of Fame from new Conquest; in others, of ease and sensuall pleasure; in others, of admiration, or being flattered for excellence in some art, or other ability of the mind[15]

After her conquest, the Empress is still unsatisfied and strives for more power. She decides to create new worlds through her imagination that she can manipulate and control to an even greater extent than she could with her terrestrial worlds. Her thirst for domination and power never ceases throughout the text. She notices that every regime seems to have a similar desire for mastery.

> especially did the Empress's soul take much notice of the several actions of human creatures in all the several nations and parts of that world and

[14] Ibid. 70.
[15] Ibid. 70.

> wondered that for all there were so many several nations, governments, laws, religions, opinions, etc. [. . .] that not any particular state, kingdom or commonwealth, was contented with their own shares, but endeavoured to encroach upon their neighbours, and that their greatest glory was in plunder and slaughter (*TBW* 190)

Regardless of where the Empress observes, she perceives the same human ambitions, creating a parallel to Hobbes' theory of a human nature that has an unquenchable desire for conquest, power and ultimate domination over others.

The Blazing World demonstrates multiple scientific ideologies, but specifically depicts a world through a Hobbesian looking glass. Even religion in *The Blazing World* parallels Hobbes' beliefs that religion has a "purpose to make those men that relyed on them, the more apt to Obedience, Lawes, Peace, Charity, and civill Society" and for many it "is a part of humane Politiques; and teacheth part of the duty which Earthly Kings require of their Subjects."[16] The only reason the Empress has any interest in creating churches is to further her own sovereignty. She realizes that physical force is only one facet of power and that manipulating the people's minds through religion would stabilize and strengthen her regime. The text presents religion as a necessary apparatus to secure and maintain political authority particularly since organized religion is never portrayed as an actual form of spirituality or mysticism. As if heeding Hobbes advice, the Empress perceives the potential of religious devotion as the best way "to govern others, and make unto themselves the greatest use of their Powers."[17] The Empress uses scientific technology to make her "artifically contrived" chapels appear supernatural where she

[16] Ibid. 79.
[17] Ibid. 75.

"appeared like an angel," thereby encouraging her subjects into obedience "in all other duties and employments" (*TBW* 164).

Religion not only secures domestic authority, but part of the Empress's strategy for colonization is to perform a spectacular visual display of power. Appearing like an image of Christ, the Empress walks on water, radiates light and "appeared as glorious as the sun" (*TBW* 215). The vanquished population consequently "believed her to be some celestial creature, or rather an uncreated goddess" (*TBW* 215). For these people, she is more than sovereign, she becomes the image of divinity itself. However, using manipulation, science and conquest in order to become a visual manifestation of God is in sharp contrast to the early modern absolutist perception of power. Edward Symmons, who is credited with contributing to *Eikon Basilike*, argues that the sovereign was "also the *Image* of Christ as God."[18] Using similar language, John Doughty, an extreme divine right theorist, claims that Charles is "the truest and livelist image of God upon earth."[19] Parodying absolutist theory, the Empress appears dramatically as a divine image, yet this manifestation is not caused by mystical, sovereign power, but through self-interest and exploitation of scientific technology. Ros Ballaster argues that "Cavendish repeatedly associates women with the power of performance and illusion."[20] Throughout *The Blazing World*, the power of the Empress is highly associated with religious spectacle which constantly proves illusory and performative. Furthermore, religious principles are not the motivation behind her dazzling performance where she radiates light, walks

[18] Edward Symmons, *A Loyall Subjects Beliefe* (1643) 13, qtd. in Smith 105.
[19] John Doughty, *The Kings Cause* (1644) 3, qtd. in Smith 105.
[20] Ros Ballaster, "Restoring the Renaissance: Margaret Cavendish and Katherine Philips," *Renaissance Configurations: Voices/Bodies/Spaces, 1580-1690*, ed. Gordon McMullan (MacMillan Press Ltd., 1998) 242.

on water and seemingly performs miracles. After playing the part of divine spectacle, the Empress dictates the terms of her domination. The conquered population are so amazed by her Goddess-like appearance that "they all had a desire to worship her" and thus obey her (*TBW* 215). Unlike divine right theories that argued sovereignty is the image of God, *The Blazing World* instead illustrates that it is merely a performance of power to induce subordination. Since power is performative, it is an active strategy, rather than a static position. These fantastic visual displays of power, along with the use of scientific technologies, demonstrate that securing authority takes vast amounts of effort. In recent critical theory, Michel Foucault also understands power as a

> strategy, that is effects of domination are attributed not to 'appropriation', but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess...In short this power is exercised rather than possessed.[21]

The Empress does not simply possess her power, but instead exercises immense amounts of time and effort strategically developing and sustaining her mastery, demonstrating that "government thereof is rather a trouble, than a pleasure; for order cannot be without industry, contrivance and direction; besides, the magnificent state, that great Princes keep or ought to keep, is troublesome" (*TBW* 190). Perhaps this is the reason why the Emperor so quickly and willingly gave up his position, allowing the Empress to change the world to her will. Not only is there little pleasure in keeping power, but it must be constantly maintained.

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[21] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977) 26.

Power is difficult to sustain and religious conformity is fundamental for obtaining obedience in the Blazing World. Hobbes also argues that to secure the power of one monarch, there should be one God with one, uniform and public method of worship.[22] As a consequence, religious principles will then induce uniform obedience.

> The Scripture was written to shew unto men the kingdome of God, and to prepare their mindes to become his obedient subjects; leaving the world, and the Philosophy thereof, to the disputation of men, for the exercising of their naturall Reason[23]

If a monarch is reliant upon organized religion, to debate religion is to contend the political structure and Hobbes attacks sciences that theorize divine or moral issues; "From this false doctrine, men are disposed to debate with themselves, and dispute the commands of the Common-wealth; and afterwards to obey, or disobey them" and thus, "the Common-wealth is distracted and *Weakened.*"[24] A stable society cannot allow diversity in religious and moral opinions because this would allow variety in political values causing disagreement, factions and civil war.

II. The Departure from Hobbes

Although both Cavendish and Hobbes depict a manipulative relation between monarchy and religion, Cavendish diverges from Hobbes' belief that debates can only safely occur within the realm of secular philosophy. As the Empress allows

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[22] Similar to the portrayal of religious conformity in *The Blazing World*, Hobbes argues that "But seeing a Common-wealth is but one Person, it ought also to exhibite to God but one Worship; which then it doth, when it commandeth it to be exhibited by Private men, Publiquely. And this is Publique Worship; the property whereof, is to be *Uniforme*" (Hobbes 252).
[23] Ibid. 223.
[24] Ibid. 223.

debates within scientific communities which are comprised of various hybrid creatures, *The Blazing World* demonstrates that disputations within all of the various scientific groups, including secular, natural philosophy, similarly threaten the political and social order of the world.

> but now perceiving that the world is not so quiet as it was at first, I am much troubled at it; especially there are such contentions and divisions between the worm-, bear-, and fly-men, the ape-men, the satyrs, the spider-men, and all others of such sorts, that I fear they'll break out into an open rebellion, and cause a great disorder and the ruin of the government (*TBW* 201)

Even the fly-men and worm-men who are her natural philosophers are part of the turmoil.[25] Cavendish takes Hobbes' method to its logical extreme to demonstrate the problems with Hobbes' own theories.[26] Although the Empress has only one uniform religion, she ultimately does not succeed in maintaining political stability; thus Hobbes' theory fails in this world.

Not only is Hobbes' philosophy examined, the idea advocated by Bacon and the Royal Society, that knowledge and research should be openly discussed and debated for the public good is portrayed as ironically being extremely effective for creating superior technologies for colonization and conquest. Yet, the very sharing of diverse opinions within science which initially strengthens the Empress's power is simultaneously a severe threat to the stability of society. She realizes that in order to secure her power and maintain a stable political system, she cannot allow freedom of expression and ideas within her scientific communities.

> I would advise your Magesty to dissolve all their societies; for 'tis better to be without their intelligences, than to have an unquiet and disorderly

[25] "the fly-, worm- and fish-men [were] her natural philosophers" (*TBW* 134).

[26] Jacqueline Broad argues that in Cavendish's philosophy, Thomas More's method is taken to its logical extreme to critique his own theories. However, it appears that this method of argument is not confined to More as Cavendish explores Hobbesian ideas in the same way. See Jacqueline Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 36.

> government. The truth is, said she, wheresoever is learning, there is most commonly also controversy and quarrelling [. . .] which must needs breed factions in their schools, which at last break out into open wars, and draw sometimes an utter ruin upon a state or government (*TBW* 202)

Although the Empress's power is secured through the joint efforts of diverse scientific communities, a paradox is created since the very diversity of ideas that assist her domination could simultaneously destabilize her authority. The community of giants become excellent architects who learn to "make such ships as could swim under water" to help the Empress in her naval conquest (*TBW* 206). Even the astronomers, the bear-men, whom she critiques so harshly in the beginning, "were as serviceable to her as the north-star" (*TBW* 207) and their knowledge is crucial for her war since they view "through their telescopes what towns and cities those were that would not submit; and having a full information thereof, she instructed the bird- and bear-men what towns they should begin withal" (*TBW* 213). Though her scientific communities are intrinsic to her political power, the open communication of ideas and knowledge has altered the Blazing World. Though she believes that having one God, one language, one law and one monarch keeps her world peaceful, allowing multiple scholarly ideas would expand knowledge and beliefs, including ideas regarding an absolute monarch.

Although it could be argued that Cavendish was recognizing the religious systems behind the various scientific traditions, the text suggests that any diversity or debate of any kind is threatening. This is made particularly evident by the logicians who practice "the art of disputing" (*TBW* 160). The Empress finds their debates so threatening she fears they will disturb "divinity and policy, religion and laws, and by that means draw an utter ruin and destruction both upon church and state" (*TBW*

162). Cavendish examines Hobbes' rationale to demonstrate that any diversity of opinions would be destructive within this framework. The Hobbesian concept of using ultimate coercion, fear and force to stabilize a society is thus explored in the Blazing World, examining the potential implications and consequences that could occur, including the termination of all scientific research, knowledge and freedom of expression. Far from utopian fantasy, *The Blazing World* appears in a dystopian perspective as the potential consequences of Hobbesian thought is portrayed. Marina Leslie argues that utopian narratives have underlying threats of dystopia where unnatural female monsters or voraciously sexual Amazons rule with their appetites.[27] Cavendish subverts the misogyny in utopia as the men are sexually monstrous and the natives are ironically polite, educated and civil. More importantly, it is the science, technology and philosophy from the Old World which create dystopia, rather than natives from The New World.

While it could be argued that Cavendish is portraying an almost extreme version of Hobbesian theory simply to advocate it, she ultimately rejects it within the actual text. It is thus crucial to understand where else she departs from his ideology and how this affects her political theory. As the character, "Margaret Cavendish" attempts to create a world structured from Hobbes' principles, it proves more like "a company of wolves that worry sheep, or like so many dogs that hunt after hares; and when she found a reaction equal to those pressures, her mind was so squeezed together, that her thoughts could neither move forward nor backward" (*TBW* 188). Cavendish, perhaps intentionally, does not make clear whether she is critiquing his

[27] See Marina Leslie, "Antipodal Anxieties: Joseph Hall, Richard Brome, Margaret Cavendish and the Cartographies of Gender," *Genre* 15 (1997): 51-78 and Marina Leslie, *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) 115-175.

political theories or his science since both rely upon the idea of force. Hobbes believes that not only political force of a monarch is needed for effective, orderly government but that all motion in nature is caused by force.

> Whatsoever is at rest, will always be at rest, unless there be some other body besides it, which, by endeavoring to get into its place by motion, suffers it no longer to remain at rest.[28]

This is not only the opposite of Cavendish's position, who not only believes that every aspect of matter has the power of self-movement (and is thus not passively forced into motion), but it fundamentally contrasts with her overall theory of nature.

III. Nature

Nature is a force that cannot be controlled or mastered by 'art' or culture within Cavendish's conception of the world. This challenges one of the basic tenets of Hobbes' royalist philosophy; that social constructs force humanity out of their natural state of war. The contract between the monarch and subjects is the most successful means to subdue their natural instincts or inclinations towards brutality. In direct opposition to Hobbes, Cavendish claims that art, which would include "government," can never control or be superior to nature.[29]

> some men are so much for Art, as they endeavour to make Art, which is onely a Drudgery-maid of Nature, the chief Mistress, and Nature her Servant, which is as much as to prefer Effects before the Cause, Nature before God (*PL* 36)

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[28] Thomas Hobbes, *The Collected Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. William Molesworth, vol. 1 (London: Routledge Press, 1994) 115.

[29] *The Oxford English Dictionary* states that seventeenth-century definitions of art included "Human skill as an agent, human workmanship. Opposed to nature" (*OED* 657).

Art and culture are part of the body of Nature and thus serve her. Since art is only an effect of Nature, cultural practices can not change or regulate the fundamental behavior or inclination of natural phenomenon.

> Nature doth not rule God, nor Man Nature, nor Politick Government Man; for the Effect cannot rule the Cause, but the Cause doth rule the Effect: Wherefore if men do not naturally agree, Art cannot make unity amongst them, or associate them into one Politick Body and so... rule them. [. . .] It is not the artificial form that governs men in a Politick Government (*PL* 47,48)

This passage suggests that nothing can master or command their creator since nature cannot rule God, man cannot govern Nature, and consequently governments cannot control humanity. Governments are compared to a mechanical watch that will never transcend or rule a Watch-maker; "Man rules an artificial Government, and not the Government Man, just like as a Watch-maker rules his Watch, and not the Watch the Watch-maker" (*PL* 48). Since the mechanical watch is artificial and unnatural, it is a force that cannot bind nature. Consequently, governments and contracts cannot control humanity and are also artificial; "although there is no Art that is not made by Nature, yet Nature is not made by Art" (*PL* 23). Thus, any political system, including monarchy is created and sustained by art, rather than through any fixed order within the universe.

Though Cavendish believes that art is an effect of Nature, Hobbes argues that culture and nature are opposing forces. Without government or contracts there are

> no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short[30]

[30] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 89.

Culture and society cannot occur within the natural, solitary, brutish state of humanity. Contracts are needed to designate rulers, to induce order and allow culture to emerge from humanity's violent natural state. Although Hobbes argues contracts create society and thus stability, in contrast, Cavendish argues that no art will induce stability since it cannot control the forces of Nature.

Understanding Cavendish's conception of Nature in relation to government and society is significant for Cavendish scholarship since critics such as Marilyn Williamson assert that her "thinking was constrained by her allegiance to nature" because the emphasis upon nature demonstrates a conservative, essentialist belief system where nature "has ordered the cosmos so that moral spiritual values may be based on that order."[31] According to this interpretation, Cavendish does not oppose the status quo, and instead upholds hierarchy since human inequalities are induced by the "bias of nature," rather than social constructions.[32] As a result, Williamson argues that Cavendish's thinking was entirely consonant with patriarchal theory of her time and earlier.[33] Yet, when understood in context of her philosophy, nature is a point of departure for her to critique society since all social customs, including government are actually artificial. By contrast with much of Cavendish scholarship, my argument is that an emphasis upon nature is not a conservative gesture, but serves as a foundation to explore and critique political theory, including conservative ideology. For example, in *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, she explicitly states that monarchy cannot occur within nature for

[31] Marilyn Williamson, *Raising Their Voices: British Women Writers, 1650-1750* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990) 63, 46.
[32] Ibid. 42.
[33] Ibid. 52.

> it is impossible, that one single part should be King of the whole Creature, since Rational and Sensitive Matter is divided into so many parts, which have equal power and force of action in their turns and severall imployments; for though Nature is a Monarchess over all her Creatures, yet in every particular Creature is a Republick, and not a Monarchy; for no part of any Creature has a sole supreme Power over the rest (*PL* 337).

Though Hobbes argues that equality is what causes the need for monarchy, Cavendish is arguing that the inherent equality within all of nature makes sovereignty impossible. Since humans are 'creatures', then no one human can have absolute power over the population since even within one body, worlds are infinitely regressing, expanding and dividing, whereby boundaries of territory and power are impossible to categorize. As royalists characterized the civil wars as unnatural,[34] Cavendish appears to be arguing that monarchy itself is unnatural and impossible. Similar to her science that attacks the hermetic emphasis upon one medicine to rule or contain all diseases, Cavendish's universe is too complex and enigmatic to allow one entity or one type of government to establish a fixed order. Thus, if we believe that Cavendish's interest in Nature is merely a royalist gesture, her scientific theories are extremely problematic, however if she is seen as questioning monarchy and its ideological justifications, then she is presenting a comprehensive and radical discussion of the politics and problems of royalist tenets.

Cavendish's conception of nature is also subversive in context of absolutists' understandings of humanity. Though Hobbes uses republican discourse to advocate monarchy, the premise of his beliefs is nonetheless based upon a basic royalist concept; that a society without monarchy would inevitably lead to anarchy.

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[34] Gweno Williams, "Margaret Cavendish, *A True Relation of My Birth, Breeding and Life*," *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. Anita Pacheco (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002) 172.

Traditional absolutists also depict human nature as needing government. Monarchy was the best method to prevent humanity from falling into what was considered the most miserable fate, anarchy. For example, James I claims that without monarchy there would be complete lawlessness and disorder, and that this is the worse form of tyranny.[35] Yet, Cavendish's position is problematic within this ideological framework. In *The Blazing World*, "Although there be numerous, nay, infinite worlds, answered the spirits, yet none is without government" (*TBW* 184, 185). Challenging one of the basic premises of royalist ideology, Cavendish is arguing that there is no such thing as anarchy. Every world, whether it is human or atomic, always has some form of government or order. If every world or aspect of matter has government, than the argument that monarchy is necessary for peace and security is rendered void. This concept is reflected in her science where "Nature hath but One Law, which is a wise Law, viz. to keep Infinite matter in order" (*PL* 146). Though power and stability of one particular regime can never be permanently maintained, regardless of its spectacular performances of power, the regime also cannot fall into anarchy; instead it will be replaced by another order. Cavendish's concept of disorder paradoxically being the principle of order can be better understood through her atomic theory.

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[35] In "The Trew Law of Free Monarchies", James I argues that "a king cannot be imagined to be so unruly and tyrannous, but the common-wealth will be kept in better order, notwithstanding thereof, by him, than it can be by his way-taking. For first, all sudden mutations are perillous in common-wealths, hope being thereby given to all bare men to set up themselves, and flie with other mens feathers, the reines being loosed to all the insolencies that disordered people can commit by hope of impunitie, because of the loosenesse of all things" and consequently, if there is no King, "nothing is unlawful to none" (James I, "The Trew Law of Free Monarchies: OR The Reciprock and mutuall duetie betwixt a free King, and his naturall Subjects," *King James VI and I: Selected Writings*, eds., Neil Rhodes, Jennifer Richards and Joseph Marshall (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd. 2003) 274, 275). If 'nothing is unlawful' and people attempt to 'flie with other mens feathers', then without a monarch, there is no law , order or respect to social titles and hierarchy and the worst tyrant would prove better than this type of anarchy.

IV. Atoms

Cavendish's politics can also be better understood in the context of her scientific thought. Much can be learned about an individual's value-system by examining his or her science and Cavendish's politics can specifically be comprehended more clearly in relation to her atomic theories, particularly since she often creates links between the nature of atoms and that of humanity. Anna Battigelli argues that the "physical universe, the political world, the mind - each of these could be envisioned as an atomist system." Emma Rees also depicts a relation between human nature and atoms arguing that Cavendish portrays the self as analogous to an atom; "I remaine an unsettled *Atome*, or a confus'd heape" (*PF* sig. A6r). Although the universe within Cavendish's science is described as infinite and ultimately incomprehensible, all creatures are derived from one substance, matter, which has certain qualities that all creatures share, whether atom or human. If atoms are analogies for Cavendish's politics, an understanding of Cavendish's atomic theories will facilitate a clearer idea of her political sentiments and, consequently, her literature.

Although Cavendish often discusses atomism, in both *Philosophical Letters* and *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, she dismisses her previous theories. Yet, in both scientific treatises, Cavendish refers the readers to her previous books and even to particular pages in order to understand her atomic theory. In *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, she enigmatically asks her audience to read her previous works, while simultaneously rejecting the same theories; "And as for

Atoms, after I had Reasoned with my Self, I conceived that it was not probable, that the Universe and all the Creatures therein could be Created and Disposed by the Dancing and Wandering and Dusty motion of Atoms" (*PPO* sig. c1r). Jay Stevenson explains that this strange paradox is partially because Cavendish's atomic theory was a potentially dangerous position (with its associations with atheism and unorthodoxy) and also because disagreement and contradiction is precisely the state of Cavendish's atoms. He claims that this later shift in her science should not be taken at face value and her supposed revised science, that excludes atoms, is virtually the same philosophy but with different terminology.[36] She argues that atoms could not exist,

> for if Every and Each Atome were of a Living Substance, and had Equal Power, Life and Knowledge, and Consequently, a Free-will and Liberty, and so Each and Every one were as Absolute as an other, they would hardly Agree in one Government, and as unlikely as Several Kings would Agree in one Kingdom, or rather as Men, if every one should have an Equal Power, would make a Good Government; and if it should Rest upon Consent and Agreement, like Human Governments, there would be as many Alterations and Confusions of Worlds, as in Human States and Governments (*PPO* sigs. c1r, c2v).

Cavendish's reasons for disclaiming her atoms, actually resembles and parallels her scientific theories which claim all matter has free-will, life and knowledge.[37] This statement results in affirming her atomism and making a statement about humanity. Since humanity can never find consensus and agree upon one opinion this indicates the disparity in human opinion will always be infinite. Yet, according to her science, such conflicts are natural and necessary since this description of humanity is also a reflection of the state of nature and matter. As previously argued, these disagreements, along with consensus, are the glue that cements atoms and reality

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[36] Jay Stevenson, "The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 36.3 (1996): 536.

together. Antipathy and sympathy between atomic particles are what form the world. The variety in the one body of nature creates an infinite variety of reactions amongst its entities in regards to each other, creating infinite worlds and creatures. Some parts of matter have various degrees of negative, positive or neutral reactions towards one another and this is the glue or cement that holds forms within matter together.[38] Thus there can be no true, perfect or unchanging government, since human opinions and governments are as variable as the changes and variety in atoms and the natural world.

This suggests that there is no natural hierarchy since all creatures, even ones as small as atoms, are absolute with free-will, knowledge and need to disagree to make matter into forms. This emphasis upon heterogeneity, disorder and instability further contradicts the aims of royalist science. Jonathan Sawday argues that the 'Royal Science' was

> Challenged, internally, by mechanism, and externally by the forces of a new order of government, the body had to be entirely remoulded. This was the task which Royalist science set itself in the years following the civil war. Stability, order, rationality, systematization, solidity, the privileging (as Helen Burke notes, following Deleuze and Guattari) of homogeneity over heterogeneity, these were the hallmarks of 'Royal Science.'[39]

However, in Cavendish's thought, the body of nature is in constant conflict and chaos. Furthermore there is no supernatural order placed upon the material world. If there is no supernatural or divine rank, the argument for Cavendish's royalism is again problematic. If every aspect of nature has free-will, is equal and has "an equal

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[37] "nature hath a natural Free-will" (*PL* 225) and "there is life and knowledg in all parts of nature" (*PL* 99).

[38] The motions within matter can make an "an agreeable union and conjunction in the several parts of Metal or Stone," creating a kind of "glue or cement [that] holds the parts of hard matter" together. (*PL* 167).

power [which] would make a Good Government," then one entity would not have a divine right to a hierarchical position such as a monarch.

If political systems and power are not derived from contracts, God, or any hierarchical order, then how does this relate to her perceived extreme royalist ideology? In some ways her philosophy can be interpreted as advocating royalist values, but there are fundamental problems and contradictions within this theory, which questions critical assumptions that she was a staunch supporter of such politics. Considering her systematic critique of epistemology and cultural politics, it would seem out of character for Cavendish to leave a definition or meaning unchallenged, particularly one such as monarchy that was so crucial and fiercely debated within the seventeenth-century. Whether Cavendish is a royalist or not, monarchy is a term that she redefines and challenges, demonstrating its problems from various angles and perspectives.

V. Stability and Change

Although Cavendish's science appears to advocate egalitarian values, throughout *The Blazing World*, absolute monarchy, power and conformity of all opinions are recurrent ideas that are explored and apparently advocated. Perhaps, in the aftermath of turmoil from the civil war, conformity of all opinions may have appeared to be the only way to have a peaceful and stable society. Yet, as *The Blazing World* explores absolute power and sovereignty, it parallels Cavendish's

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[39] Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995) 242.

science by demonstrating that nature is in a constant state of movement and change. If human behavior and governments reflect nature, then no government or structure of any kind would be static since change and free-will are the main characteristics of the natural world where "parts being restless, undergo perpetual changes and transmutations by their infinite compositions and divisions" (*TBW* 154). The natural state of matter is restlessness, rather than a fixed hierarchical order. The Empress cannot keep her omnipotent power and political order forever since all aspects of matter "are subject to infinite changes and transmutations by virtue of their own corporeal, figurative self-motions" (*TBW* 152, 153). Aware that human nature is inclined to change and rebellion, the Empress constantly seeks methods to secure her absolute sovereignty.

> But at last, pondering with herself the inconstant nature of mankind, and fearing that in time they would grow weary, and desert the divine truth, following their own fancies, and living according to their own desires, she began to be troubled that her labours and pains should prove of so little effect, and therefore studied all manner of ways to prevent it (*TBW* 163)

Having absolute power does not guarantee political stability. As much as the Empress strives for a stable world without rebellion or dissent, she can not ultimately secure her authority. Since all creatures have free-will, unanimous opinions and permanent structures are impossible.

If diversity in opinions is what unsettles political structures, then this would explain why the Empress is constantly attempting to safeguard her omnipotence, particularly by infiltrating her power into the multiple facets of life. She receives absolute power in the Blazing World and later gains mastery, through military conquest, over her native world. She not only dominates the religion in the Blazing World, she creates it. She is their Goddess and her temples are their heaven and hell:

her subjects claim "their Blazing World had but one Emperor, one government, one religion, and one language, so there was but one passage into that world, which was so little" that it was difficult to enter (*TBW* 205). She governs the academic knowledge from scientific communities and her spirits serve as spies that could report any potential problems. The less variety in a world, the more its structure is strengthened or fortified, not allowing other ideas. Yet, although the passage is narrow, it is not impenetrable. No matter how much conformity she enforces, there still is dissent that threatens civil war. The question that the text poses to the reader is if all society is unified into conformity, would the Empress have been able to maintain her power? This is a crucial question in relation to problems with the civil war. Does suppression of diverse opinions result in political and social stability?

Although the Blazing World is not able to maintain stability or conformity of opinions, the Empress does create a fantasy world devoid of rebellions and diversity.

> it was so well ordered that it could not be mended; for it was governed without secret and deceiving policy; neither was there any ambition, factions, malicious detractions, civil dissensions, or home-bred quarrels, divisions in religion, foreign wars, etc. but all the people lived in a peaceful society, united tranquility, and religious conformity (*TBW* 189).

A peaceful and stable political structure would be based upon suppression of diverse religious opinions. Yet, the same problems which occur in the Blazing World (which for some time is stable, peaceful without any dissension) could happen to her new world. Unlike Hobbes who emphasizes religious conformity, the Empress realizes that knowledge is power and any variant opinion of any kind could have political repercussions. Neil Ankers claims that Cavendish argues for the right to refuse to submit to any conformist system, yet she equally wants to promote unity and order

for society.[40] However, though the text suggests that a stable society is one where all beliefs, opinions and knowledge must be united into one, the concept of fixed order and complete conformity is ultimately an illusion. Regardless of whether an individual's sovereignty appears absolute, no matter how much one suppresses opinions and dominates a population, power is transitory and one fixed, unchanging government is not possible. Since the natural state of matter and life is free-will and change, governments will alter as well.

VI. The Imagination

As *The Blazing World* explores conformity and stability, it also complicates the significance of the actual monarch. Cavendish acknowledges that sovereigns have immense control and influence over the masses, but through discerning the limits of political domination she reveals the imaginative aspects of power. This is exemplified in the Empress who

> possesses a whole world, yet enjoys she but a part thereof; neither is she so much acquainted with it, that she knows all the places, countries and dominions she governs. The truth is, a sovereign monarch has the general trouble; but the subjects enjoy all the delights and pleasures in parts; for it is impossible, that a kingdom, nay, a country should be enjoyed by one person at once, except he take the pains to travel into every part, and endure the inconveniencies of going from one place to another; wherefore, since glory, delight and pleasure lives but in other men's opinions, and can neither add tranquillity to your mind, nor give ease to your body, why should you desire to be Empress of a material world, and be troubled with the cares that attend your government? (*TBW* 186)

[40] Neil Ankers, "Paradigms and Politics: Hobbes and Cavendish Contrasted," *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish*, ed. Stephen Clucas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) 251.

Through presenting the limitations of monarchy, Cavendish questions the very nature of power. The monarch's power is to some extent imaginary since it cannot actually control, experience or conceive every aspect of the kingdom. The monarch cannot truly possess land or be able to command absolute obedience since she or he could not comprehend or perceive all of it with their corporeal senses. Cavendish situates humanity into a humbling theory of multiple perspectives and exposes the limits of even the most absolute human power. The subjects are able to enjoy aspects of the dominion that are inaccessible to the monarch and have to some extent, autonomy that the monarch can never control.

In *The World's Olio* Cavendish demonstrates the problems with defining power.

> The Mind is like a Commonwealth, and the Thoughts as the Citizens therein; or the Thoughts like Household-servants, who are busily imployed about the Minds Affairs, who is the Master (*The World's Olio*, 95).

In describing the mind as a commonwealth with 'citizens' opposed to subjects, Cavendish invokes images of republicanism. Turning early modern political metaphors upside down, the sovereign is surprisingly not the head of the body, but the citizens have appropriated the monarchical position. Furthermore, just as a person cannot always control their individual, private thoughts and emotions (which Cavendish would define as having their own free-will), a monarch or any regime cannot really control its subjects. Through an animistic world-view, it becomes unclear who really has power and who is obedient. Since there are infinite realities constantly creating and expanding, the boundaries of where one world begins and ends, is not definable just as power is not always clear or simple. Thus, the

Empress's argument that the most natural state of humanity is monarchy does not function within this theoretical framework.

> it was natural for one body to have but one head, so it was also natural for a politic body to have but one governor; and that a commonwealth, which had many governors was like a monster with many heads (*TBW* 134).

The concept of one head to rule one body is challenged as there are multiple forms and consciousnesses within one body since there would be infinite bodies and atoms within a single head. If there are innumerable worlds within worlds within one body, then it is unlikely that the thoughts of even one human could agree. Stevenson argues that Cavendish's poetry indicates that psychological and social order must be imagined. There "is no absolute king of the mind's jungle" and "all thoughts are similarly motivated by the exigencies of survival."[41] Cavendish's thus subverts the common early modern metaphor of the physical body, representing the body politic, which needs to be governed by the mind which is allegorically the monarch. One political body or perspective is more monstrous since it denies more opinions than a parliament. Ankers argues that Cavendish offers a non-coercive approach to politics where limits arise naturally from a perception of relationship of parts to parts.[42] Yet, relations between parts will always be in a state of flux since, similar to atoms or matter, humans are always going to disagree and will struggle to gain dominance.

Cavendish's time in exile with the English court may have influenced the concept of imaginary power since the king was in a sense a fictitious ruler. Gallagher argues that during the years of exile

> Charles II was himself the ruler of a kind of fantasy kingdom. In a sense, the exile literalized the monarch's metaphoric significance. The real king had

[41] Stevenson, "Imagining the Mind: Cavendish's Hobbesian Allegories," 148.
[42] Ankers 249.

> become the ruler of what amounted to a microcosm, had almost been reduced to a private kingdom, and hence had practically enacted the metaphorical equivalence of sovereign monarch and sovereign private person.[43]

Whether the King was ruling from abroad or within his own domain, he still ruled places and people he had never seen and experienced. If a ruler cannot actually possess, experience or even rule a kingdom, power derives from the minds of both sovereign and subjects, unlike royalist contentions that it was from God above. This concept of authority would have been particularly pertinent since Scotland pronounced Charles II King of Scotland well before the Restoration.[44] In *The World's Olio* Cavendish argues that a man who is unjust and harsh can successfully rule "his wife and servants [who] never accustomed to any other government before, [will] willingly submit" but if the customs alter

> by making new laws, and to set other rules, although they are more commodious, easie, pleasant, and plentiful; yet being unusual, the servants begin to murmur, the children to complain, factions and side-taking grows, until there is a falling out (*TWO* 47).

To change government, one must reconfigure the entire system of knowledge and customs "for mixt laws of old and new, will no more agree in government, then crosse humours in a private family" (*TWO* 48). Thus, there is not one system of government which is best or most stable, neither is there one superior form of political science or state craft, power merely is stabilized from a system of knowledge that justifies and reinforces the regime. Foucault also theorizes about the relation between knowledge and power arguing that

> power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any

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[43] Gallagher 139.

[44] M. H. Abrams, ed., "The Early Seventeenth Century, 1603-1660," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th ed., vol. 1 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000) 1223.

> knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations[45]

It is through manipulating knowledge and the mind that authority is maintained. If power and knowledge are intrinsically connected, then this would explain why the Empress changes the entire society of the Blazing World, from the religious establishment to scientific inquiry; she needs to alter the entire system to adequately justify her authority for she "knew well, that belief was a thing not to be forced or pressed upon the people, but to be instilled into their minds by gentle persuasions" (*TBW* 164). The Empress continually needs to manipulate the minds of her subjects in order to control them. For "He is the greatest Monarch that is most beloved of the subject, because he hath not onely the power over mens bodies, but over their minds" (*TWO* 49). The institutions within the Blazing World are conducive to her absolute power. The Empress' subjects claim that their government coincide with their culture since

> a monarchy is a divine form of government, and agrees most with our religion; for as there is but one God, whom we all unanimously worship and adore with one faith, so we are resolved to have but one Emperor, to whom we all submit with one obedience (*TBW* 134).

Through depicting the multifaceted aspect of power, Cavendish exposes how different institutions reinforce and justify their combined influence. Various structures simultaneously perpetrate ideologies that all strengthen and maintain a reality which appears natural, securing obedience from the population. For example, if science, religion and monarchy all interpret the world in a similar way, then their combined control is even more secure, making their world-view appear natural or normal.

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[45] Foucault 27.

Though it takes much effort for a monarch to maintain power, even an author such as Cavendish cannot sustain absolute power or stability within her own text as *The Blazing World* fragments into different perspectives and realities. As Cavendish the author (distinct from the character) interposes into the Epilogue, she claims that if the people whom she created in her world are "willing to be my subjects, they may imagine themselves such, and they are such, I mean, in their minds, fancies or imaginations; but if they cannot endure to be subjects, they may create worlds of their own, and govern themselves as they please" (*TBW* 225). This change in perspective shifts the meaning of the text from portraying and advocating a totalitarian, oppressive government into an entirely different politics. Though Cavendish, as author, is God-like as creator of *The Blazing World*, this statement not only acknowledges the instability of her own fictional regime, but more radically suggests that power derives not from the author/sovereign, but from below; from the will of the subjects. Indeed, fictional characters have incredible power over their author/sovereign as demonstrated by the Empress who has the power to summon "Margaret Cavendish" into her world. Since fantasy is material in the Cavendish paradigm, than ideas from her own imagination have a free-will of their own which either accepts authority or rebels, destabilizing the regime of the mind. Even the self splits, merges and multiplies, making the boundaries of power and authority impossible to define. Thus, even if someone is God-like and is creator of a world, their power is unstable, fractured and never absolute.

Cavendish not only depicts the difficulties in defining power, but she further suggests that the mind also is a space to resist and recreate other forms of government.

> though I cannot be *Henry* the *Fifth*, or *Charles* the *Second*, yet I endeavour to be *Margaret* the *First*; and although I have neither power, time nor occasion to conquer the world as *Alexander* and *Caesar* did; yet rather than not to be mistress of one, since Fortune and the Fates would give me none, I have made a world of my own: for which no body, I hope, will blame me, since it is in every one's power to do the like (*TBW* 124).

All power and order are always self-produced and imaginary.[46] This sense of absolute ascendance and autonomy can be achieved by anybody regardless of class or sex. Any individual can be as absolutely significant and powerful as the most famous kings and conquerors. In a society based upon natural sex and class differences, this radically implies an intrinsic equality. Perhaps that is why the character "Margaret Cavendish" ultimately rejects all philosophical and religious methods of organizing her fantasy worlds for she "saw that no patterns would do her any good in the framing of her world; she resolved to make a world of her own invention" (*TBW* 188). If power structures entwine their fictions and bind them into a seemingly undeniable reality, then the social order or hierarchy will have fewer possibilities for change. Appropriating one author or institution will not necessarily alter society, but all aspects of ideology must also shift in order to create an alternative system.

Cavendish may also be suggesting that the least violent method for fulfilling one's natural desire for power would be through the imagination rather than actual conquest. Although these worlds are material as well, they can be originally created to conform to one's will and perhaps will be more willing to remain obedient subjects. Although Cavendish seems to suggest that any form of order will oppress some group, she suggests that the imagination allows the individual to experience a

[46] See Stevenson, "Imagining the Mind: Cavendish's Hobbesian Allegories," 154.

form of empowerment that is far more pleasurable for "in the formation of those worlds, I take more delight and glory, than ever Alexander or Caesar did in conquering this terrestrial world"(*TBW* 224).

Since even order created from the imagination is not absolute or perfect, no social order will ever achieve perfection either. Thus, there is always room for subversion, rebellion and social critique. Interestingly, it is only when the Empress is defying the laws and order of the Blazing World that she ever fully embody titles such as ruler, scholar, religious leader, cabalist and barrister, positions that were denied to early modern women.[47]

As monadic power and patriarchy are challenged, signifiers of aristocratic authority are also disrupted and redefined throughout *The Blazing World.* Initially, the Blazing World appears rich and magnificent. Yet as the novel progresses, we learn that unlike earth, precious jewels are the prosaic minerals within this world.

> they had an infinite quantity both of gold and precious stones in that world; for they had larger extends of gold, than our Arabian sands; their precious stones were rocks, and their diamonds of several colours; they used no coin, but all their traffic was by exchange of several commodities (*TBW* 133).

The gems that our world attributes so much importance to are actually common and have no financial worth. Although gold and precious stones have no monetary or cultural value, they are still associated with the monarchy since the Empress is not only adorned with gems, but she is crowned with them; "on her head she wore a cap of pearl, and a half-moon of diamonds just before it; on the top of her crown came spreading over a broad carbuncle, cut in the form of the sun" (*TBW* 133). Since the nobility are not attired in valuable, costly minerals, they wear emblems that are

humble. If gold and jewels have no economic value, these objects would signify the lower classes. In intermixing cultural signifiers of monarch and peasant, Cavendish is providing a commentary on the foundation of economics; that what is considered valuable, whether it is gold or a monarch, is not inherently valuable in itself. Value is placed externally by the interpretative powers of the community at large. For example, what the Empress "wondered most at, was, that they should prize or value dirt more than men's lives" (*TBW* 190). Since jewels and gold are like sand and rocks in her world, they are dirt, thus exemplifying that it is not God that defines power, status and wealth, but the collective imagination of the community.

Cavendish's own financial crises may have perpetrated the notion of imaginary aspects of monetary symbols and ownership. Both she and the Duke were in immense debt after the civil wars. Since they were both out of favor with the King, they were not repaid loans nor were returned lands that had been confiscated during the war. For years, Cavendish and her husband survived through feigning and emulating wealth. The Duke obtained multiple loans which he paid through continuously procuring more loans and inducing a perpetual cycle of debt. Neither Cavendish nor her husband disclosed their financial crises, since people would grant them loans only under the assumption that they had wealth and Cavendish lived in continual terror that her husband would be thrown in prison. Although they were utterly broke, they lived for years from an imaginary wealth that did not exist in reality.[48]

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[47] Geraldine Wagner, "Romancing Multiplicity: Female Subjectivity and the Body Divisible in Margaret Cavendish's Blazing World," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 9.1 (2003): 9.14.
[48] Mendelson 25.

VII. Multifarious Voices

As the Empress attempts to maintain and secure political power, authority to an extent appears to be obtained through chance and force. When the "inconstant" deity Fortune, makes a surprising anthropomorphic appearance in *The Blazing World*, she is not only defended by her friends Folly and Rashness, but she "did not side with those that were honest and honourable" indicating that those who have fortune and power do not have an innate superiority (*TBW* 197). Thus, fortune "seeks not Worth and Merit to advance/ Her Sceptre which she governed all, was Chance" (*APC* 105). Power does not necessarily indicate worth or merit, but is part of a dynamic, shifting world governed by chance. In a Machiavellian sense of statecraft, Cavendish's subjects are not obedient or subjugated because of natural or divine means and rulers must strategically manipulate their subjects and resources to maintain power.[49] Yet, as the Empress craftily rules over her subjects, power is still unstable and subject to chance. A sovereign will be usurped once another individual happens to gain more power paralleling the state of Cavendish's atoms which chaotically struggle for dominance. Even thoughts are portrayed as diverse elements randomly contesting for preeminence since there can be a "war in the thoughts of the Reader" (*PL* 254). Power is not absolute or even rational, but contingent on the interplay of autonomous, independent forces. Perhaps this is a way for Cavendish to explain and understand the various, violent changes in regimes that she experienced in her own lifetime.

[49] See Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1958).

Since Cavendish emphasizes instability and chance, subverting the theoretical foundation and rationale for monarchy, it would seem as though she was a supporter for parliamentary government. Although she portrays thoughts as struggling for preeminence, this is depicted as a simile to a parliament "for all that time my Brain was like an University, Senate, or Council-Chamber, wherein all my Conceptions, Imaginations, Observations, Wit and Judgment did meet, to Dispute, Argue, contrive, and Judge" (*PPO* sig. b3v). Mihoko Suzuki claims that although "Cavendish may have officially been a royalist in allegiance to her husband who was one of Charles's foremost supporters," there is "a republican strain in Cavendish's thought".[50] Victoria Kahn also perceives republican aspects in Cavendish's contract theory, which she claims ironically undermines her royalism since it corresponds closely with parliamentarian theories of political contracts and marriage, threatening hierarchical, inequitable relations between not only husband and wife, but also sovereign and subject.[51] Cavendish argues that either marriage is tyrannical for women and should be avoided or that matrimony should be inspired by romantic love. This belief disrupts feudal methods of organizing economics and power since marriage functioned as an instrument for political alliance and economic gain.

A parliamentary government would also conform closer to Cavendish's emphasis on perspectives and subjectivity. She characteristically portrays multiple opinions upon one topic, so that often it is difficult to discern which voice is Cavendish's "own" perspective. This emphasis upon plurality has frustrated critics who attempt to discern one voice or opinion within her texts. Critic, James

[50] Mihoko Suzuki, "The Essay Form as Critique: Reading Cavendish's *The World's Olio* Through Mongaigne and Bacon (and Adorno)," *Prose Studies* 22 (1999): 1-16.

Fitzmaurice claims "it is clear that she liked to consider the same problem from various viewpoints using characters to articulate each position. This practice can be puzzling,"[52] yet in emphasizing one voice, perhaps scholarship is overlooking the meanings that a multifarious discourse implies. Whitaker argues that she was broad-minded enough to see both sides of an issue and was more interested in arguing both sides of an argument than settling on one unified, fixed opinion.[53] This practice itself is subversive. For example, many understood the multiple opinions in the printing press as precarious to the social order. Nigel Smith argues that the printing press particularly caused anxiety to those who advocated monarchy. Such individuals wanted an abolition of all publications which did not emanate from royal authority.

> those who saw the church and state as indissolubly linked, and the structure of authority stemming ultimately from the unitary power of the monarchy, were frightened and repulsed by the flood of publications which they saw about them, and the different, opposed claims for authority in those publications[54]

The vast amount of information and contradictory opinions that were surfacing were threatening. How could one person claim absolute authority, when multitudes were able to publish opinions that conflicted with royal prerogative?

> there was a 'downwards dissemination' of print - a democratising of its availability. And there was still a sense - from all quarters - that the world had been destabilised by a printing surfeit. National perception had been changed for good by a media revolution[55]

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[51] Victoria Kahn, "Margaret Cavendish and the Romance of Contract," *Renaissance Quarterly* 50.2 (1997): 526-566.

[52] Fitzmaurice further claims it is "not an easy job to pin her down" (James Fitzmaurice, "Some Problems in Editing Margaret Cavendish," *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985-1991*, ed. W. Speed Hill (New York: Renaissance English Text Society, 1993) 258).

[53] Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle: Royalist, Writer and Romantic* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2002) 19.

[54] Smith 25.

[55] Ibid. 26.

The diverse perspectives available from the printing press could threateningly reach vast amounts of the population. A new kind of attitude was produced whereby a latitude of views was possible, although such broad thinking, at first and in absolute terms, was very rare. For the most part, attentive minds registered the situation of divided, multifarious voices, and tried to grasp their predicament as best they could.[56] However, far from trying to create a unified voice amongst this information revolution, Cavendish appears to have embraced the ideologies that were emerging from it. Not only did Cavendish publish a large volume of works, the texts themselves are filled with divided, multifarious voices, mirroring the actions of the printing revolution itself.[57]

However, though the multiple perspectives could indicate a more republic strain to her thinking, just because an individual critiques one political system, it does not necessarily indicate that they prefer another form. Cavendish denies that "any Part or creature of Nature" could have "any superiority or supremacy above the rest" (*OUEP* sig. 2F1v). Using the political language of hierarchy and supremacy, Cavendish is specifically arguing that the composition of matter is not derived from one substance or four elements. Denying the possibility that one entity can be a superior or defining principle emphasizes that the world is too complex for one universal to be a supreme principle over all of matter. According to this rationale, one form of government also could not be a universal, defining force since Nature is

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[56] Ibid. 26.

[57] Susan James discusses the meaning of multiple perspectives in other aspects of Cavendish's thought. James argues that although Cavendish frequently follows the standard format of orations by writing two speeches on a single topic, she sometimes breaks the rules of formal rhetoric by producing three or four on the same subject, turning the genre into a many-sided debate and demonstrating that there are sometimes more than two perspectives. Susan James, Introduction, *Margaret Cavendish: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) xxii.

far too infinite and enigmatic to be defined or governed by one type of entity. Indeed, when reading *The Blazing World* in the context of Cavendish's science, it becomes unclear what political system she is advocating. In *Nature's Pictures* she theorizes the benefits of both monarchy and republicanism using analogies of ants and bees;

> for the Bees are a Monarchial Government, as any may observe, and the Ants are a Republick. But by this we may perceive, it is not such or such kinds of Governments, but such and such wayes of governing, that make a Commonwealth flourish with Plenty, Conveniency, Curiosity, Peace, and Tranquillity; for the Monarchical Government of the Bees is as wise and happy as the Republick Commonwealth of the Ants (*NP* 165).

Both insects demonstrate that diverse and contradictory political systems can effectively govern a population. Though her multifarious voices create a closer alliance to democratic, parliamentarian ideology, if matter is infinitely variable, one political system would not necessarily be the best government in all circumstances.

VIII. Free-will and Multiple Worlds

The Blazing World not only reflects Cavendish's characteristic emphasis upon multifarious voices, it also reflects her scientific theories that indicate all creatures are equal and would individually make a good government. Throughout the text, various worlds are discovered or created. Both the Empress and the character "Margaret Cavendish" attempt to create worlds based upon the theories of various philosophers and scientists. Since Cavendish often argues that even thoughts have matter, these were more than fantasy, but actual physical worlds.[58] Although both characters satirize and critique many of the theories, each philosophical system was able to form or create an actual reality.[59] Consequently, all of these systems were in a sense valid or correct, just as a plurality of contradictory bodies and systems exist within nature. Yet, it was not just famous scientists who could create worlds.

> can any mortal be a creator? Yes, answered the spirits; for every human creature can create an immaterial world fully inhabited by immaterial creatures, and populous of immaterial subjects, such as we are, and all this within the compass of the head or scull; nay, not only so, but he may create a world of what fashion and government he will, and give the creatures thereof such motions, figures, forms, colours, perceptions, etc. as he pleases (*TBW* 185).

Any person, regardless of rank could create and rule worlds suggesting that in a manner similar to her science, the second part of *The Blazing World* is advocating a very anti-hierarchical view of humanity. Every person is thus god-like in the sense that they are creators of worlds and creatures. Since humanity is not superior to other

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[58] "Thoughts, Ideas, Conceptions, Sympathies, Antipathies, Accidents, Qualities, as also Natural Life, and Soul, are all Material" (*PL* 12).

[59] Although Cavendish humorously claims she is not able to create a world from Aristotle, satirizing the idea that "her mind, as most of the learned hold it, was immaterial, and that according to

forms of matter within the Cavendish paradigm, anything can create worlds since all parts of matter have free-will, reason and soul.

> every material part has a material natural soul; for nature is but one infinite self-moving, living and self-knowing body, consisting of the three degrees of inanimate, sensitive and rational matter, so intermixed together, that no part of nature, were it an atom, can be without any of these three degrees; the sensitive is the life, the rational the soul, and the inanimate part, the body of infinite nature (*TBW* 176)

Since all matter has reason and soul, then all creatures are capable of creating worlds that create worlds, an endless process of birth and creation. Consequently, "there were more numerous worlds than the stars which appeared in these three mentioned worlds" (*TBW* 184). Nature parallels the infinity of numbers in that "as numbers do multiply, so does the world" (*TBW* 172). As a result, the world or universe is endlessly expanding, shifting and mutating. There are realities that we cannot perceive with our limited senses, as described in her atomic poetry where "*Ladies* well may weare/ A *World* of *Worlds*, as *Pendents* in each *Eare*" (*PF* 45). One order or political system could not apply to the entirety of nature since it is eternally moving and transforming since there are an infinite amount of physical and fantasy worlds with infinite social orders. Although Gallagher claims that this infinite multiplicity of subjectivity may dizzy the reader,[60] it also dissolves the possibility of a comprehensible, hierarchical truth and its resulting universal, ordering of nature. As Jay Stevenson notes, Cavendish's philosophy "offers little reassurance to those who wish to believe in a stable and permanent cosmic order."[61]

Aristotle's principle, out of the nothing, nothing could be made; she was forced also to desist from that work" (*TBW* 187).

[60] Gallagher 144.

[61] Stevenson, "The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish," 537.

In an animistic universe filled with infinite changes and perspectives, common perceptions of the world are redefined. Something as factual as the reality of death is altered since within Cavendish's theoretical system, death does not exist. What may appear as death is a reorganization of matter and multiple forms of life may develop from one apparent demise since "what is called a decay or death, is nothing else but a change or alteration of those Motions" (*PL* 61). For example, a seed may initially appear to be destroyed, but is merely transforming into another form; the "seeds of vegetables were so far from being annihilated in their productions, that they did rather numerously increase and multiply; for the division of one seed, said they, does produce numbers of seeds out of itself" (*TBW* 152). A seed not only demonstrates her contention that there is no death in matter, but also that subjects are simultaneously both creator and created. Though all creatures are God-like, other aspects of matter will eventually affect and alter their body, creating new forms. Common cultural categories and conceptions of the world are shifted and redefined as the boundaries between life, death, monarch, God and subject become blurred and intermixed.

In redefining power within a materialist, yet animistic frame-work, Cavendish uses the politically charged seventeenth-century trope of the garden to demonstrate how both strife and agreement simultaneously exist in Nature.[62]

> for the several parts of the earth do join and assist each other in composition or framing of such or such particulars; and many times, there are factions and divisions, which cause productions of mixed species; as for example, weeds, instead of sweet flowers and useful fruits; but gardeners and husbandmen use often to decide their quarrels, and cause them to agree; which though it shows a kindness to the differing parties, yet 'tis a great prejudice to the worms, and

[62] An example of how the garden was conceived as a political landscape, particularly in relation to the civil wars, see Andrew Marvell, "Upon Appleton House," *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Nigel Smith (London: Peason Education Limited, 2003) 210-241.

> other animal creatures that live underground; for it most commonly causes their dissolution and ruin (*TBW* 153)

Though gardeners may be assisting and ordering plant life, their actions destroy and kill many other species. Similar to Cavendish's atomic and human behavior, factions, rebellions and changes in governments occur in all aspects of nature, even within a seemingly orderly, peaceful garden. The variation in opinions and governments is what is necessary for the existence of diverse species and the natural world. Yet, this passage also suggests that any government will oppress and tyrannize while it will also give life and creation to other forms. Although Cavendish "realized that all forms of political association were a tyranny of men over women,"[63] Cavendish further suggests that any government will be a tyranny over some groups within a population. If everything in the natural world has reason and is equal, then order must equally accommodate the needs of everything. Since one order could not harmonize with all perspectives and needs, structure is the act of one entity forcing an order upon others and inducing inequality. *The Blazing World* does not give answers to what is the best government or value-system, whether it is monarchy or parliament, but that a plurality of opinions and values will and must always exist.

IX. The Autonomous Subject

Although the Empress attempts to create ultimate conformity, with hopes of unifying her world to her will, she can not ultimately contain the will of others because diversity in nature is necessary. The subjectivity and plurality in nature that

[63] Sarasohn 293.

is depicted by Cavendish has even more subversive implications. Gallagher describes how Cavendish obscures the distinction between sovereign and subject in *The Blazing World* for the monarchical image serves to represent a self-sufficient, self-enclosed, autonomous being that is not subject to anybody. Consequently, Cavendish shifts the ideology of the absolute monarch to define an absolute, complete self.[64] However, rather than demonstrating a privileged perspective, the monarch serves as foundation for subjectivity.

> What at first appears to be an absolutism that would merely lead to the subjection of all individuals except the monarch was actually for Cavendish the foundation for a subjectivity that would make its own absolute claims.[65]

Though the self is modelled upon the sovereign, the monarch itself is rendered irrelevant since the self becomes autonomous. However, this does not just apply to the self of Margaret Cavendish. The seventeenth-century conception of human as microcosm is extended to all creatures; if "a fly or worm was a little world, then man was so too" (*TBW* 169, 170). Every person and unit of matter, whether it is human or fly, parallels monarchy since they are individually a self-contained, whole, distinct and true world. If every unit of matter is metaphorically an absolute sovereign, then Cavendish creates an astoundingly infinite plurality of perspectives and worlds based upon the monarchical model.[66] Even atoms would be complete, autonomous 'selves' with free-will. These atoms and worlds contrast, contradict and merge into each other, just like the worlds in the text itself. Though the self is modelled on the absolute form, it paradoxically expands and multiplies into other autonomous selves just as the worlds in *The Blazing World* regress, fracture and multiply into fantasy

[64] Gallagher 133-146.
[65] Ibid. 136, 137.
[66] Ibid. 136.

worlds. Humans are not excluded from this fragmentation as demonstrated by the Empress, "Margaret Cavendish" and the Duke of Newcastle who merged, expanded and multiplied into each other. Yet, though the self is constantly merging and fracturing, it is also simultaneously and paradoxically whole and absolute; destroying any possibility for one privileged, universal perspective.[67]

As Cavendish demonstrates how the metaphor of sovereign can be used to depict absolute autonomy, the strange link between conservative ideology and proto-feminism appears less incongruous. Perhaps seventeenth-century women found the image of the monarch appealing since it could be used as an analogy for an autonomous, complete entity that is not ruled by or subordinate to anybody. Hilda Smith attributes the relation between conservative politics and proto-feminists to the fact that as middle-class men acquired new economic and political advantages, aristocratic women actually lost power; "the Whig alternative theory made independent property-holding the crucial determinant of the rights of citizenship, in a way that debarred women more completely from real power than had the medieval notion of position conferring status."[68] Many women may have perceived more opportunities for power and status within a monarchical system compared to the more democratic Parliament, particularly since women as a social category remained apart from the groups destined to benefit from such politics. As republicanism advocated the equality and the rights of man, women were left out of the equation; women were not only excluded from parliamentarian government, but they were also not subjects or citizens. Hilda Smith argues that "political and religious

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[67] Ibid. 142, 143.
[68] Hilda L. Smith, *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-century English Feminists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982) 202.

conservatism perhaps made them especially aware of, and pleased to point out, how sexually circumscribed were the glowing definitions of liberty which emerged from that period."[69] Feudal society was a patriarchy, yet woman could hold authority in the feudal world and after the legacy of Elizabeth I, woman may have perceived potential for power and authority within this system.[70]

Though Cavendish's understanding of the absolute self appears subversive, Gillespie claims that Cavendish's transition of the ideology of absolute monarchy to that of the absolute self did not actually deconstruct or challenge a patriarchal system. She argues that it was the female sectarians who provided a model of the self that was truly radical; "it was not the king but God who provided an 'authoritative metaphor' for their self-construction as sovereign subjects" that further "inducted them into new forms of equality rather than simply re-subordinating them to fathers, husbands and masters."[71] However, in Cavendish's thought, all aspects of the material world are God-like, creating an unexpected parallel with radical sectarians. Both Cavendish and the sectarians use the metaphor of God to advocate equality, but from entirely different theoretical foundations. Cavendish uses both signifiers of divinity and sovereignty, demonstrating that every unit of matter, including a person, is literally as significant as both monarch and God himself.

If every creature is God-like, the self can be understood as a microcosm of the body of Nature, with infinite amounts of contradictory selves within one whole that is constantly changing, creating and moving. Though Gisele Venet argues that

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[69] Ibid. 10.
[70] For a more in depth discussion of how Cavendish appropriates the image of Queen Elizabeth I to portray the potential for women's empowerment see Claire Jowitt, "Imperial Dreams? Margaret Cavendish and the Cult of Elizabeth," *Women's Writing* 4:3 (1997): 353-67.
[71] Gillespie 47.

Cavendish's depiction of selfhood in her drama is unified and monadic, a conception that anticipates the modern insular understanding of self, in *The Blazing Work* the self constantly shifts and fractures as it combines with others.[72] This process is further complicated as such "merging is always subject to further transmutations."[73] The selfhood that Cavendish envisions is also infinitely connected to all aspects of the natural world so that the individual self and Nature are interchangeable, as well as life and motion.[74] As the self constantly fractures inwardly, it also splits outwardly as well, continuously interacting with and combining with matter. Thus, the self is intrinsically part of and connected to outside influences. The belief that Cavendish envisioned an insular concept of self is further made problematic since there are infinite selves within one body. Worlds and selves divide and expand into yet another continuum as exemplified by the characters within the text since "dear friends" are "like several parts of one united body" (*TBW* 183). Other people are integral parts of the self as they divide, merge and expand into one another, rendering it difficult to define the boundaries of an individual within one body. Not only are there worlds within worlds within every corporeal body, but external forces may enter since "spirits may enter into your body, if you please." Geraldine Wagner argues that Cavendish plays with the boundaries that constitute 'within' and 'without', questioning not only the line between reality and fantasy, but also between self and other so that there is no self-coherence or self-difference.[75] Thus, through hybridizing and confusing the boundaries between self and other, nature and

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[72] Gisele Venet, "Margaret Cavendish's Drama: An Aesthetic of Fragmentation," *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish*, eds. Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003) 226, 227.
[73] Wagner 9.54.
[74] Ankers 248.

humanity, Cavendish challenges common understandings of reality. How can an individual be categorized and placed within a hierarchy if the boundaries between self and other are indefinable?

X. Compassion for the Poor

When placed in context of royalist ideology, *The Blazing World* becomes increasingly problematic as a royalist, absolutist fantasy. Yet, most scholars assume that Cavendish shares the views of her husband, a royalist leader and war hero.[76] Valerie Traub reminds that "any assertion of agency must address those constraints placed on women's lives by the conceptual and material demarcations of a phallocentric system."[77] It is important to remember that women did not have the same individual public, political identity as men and as previously argued, women such as Cavendish, may have had very different opinions than their official family view.

Though she is still generally understood as a staunch royalist, in very recent criticism, scholars have begun to reveal that far from being an opportunist and egoist, Cavendish held compassion for the lower classes. In her biography of Cavendish, Whitaker notes that Cavendish had strong views regarding ways to help those suffering from poverty and she was also well known in her lifetime for her "'great

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[75] Wagner 9.34.

[76] For example, Jowitt argues that both Cavendish and her husband demonstrate similar political concerns, though Cavendish is also interested in female empowerment. Jowitt 383.

[77] See Valerie Traub, "Desire and the Differences it Makes," *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Valerie Wayne (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) 85.

mercy' and generosity towards even 'the meanest devotos.'"[78] Fitzmaurice further argues that the play, *The Lottery*, which has been previously attributed to Cavendish's husband, was most likely written by her since unlike her husband, she sometimes portrays sympathy towards the lower classes.[79] Though royalist sentiments and compassion for the poor are not necessarily incompatible, *The Blazing World* has been interpreted as being an extreme egoist fantasy about absolute power. However, the Empress views fleas and louses under a microscope and

> pitied much those that are molested with them, especially poor beggars, which although they have nothing to live on themselves, are yet necessitated to maintain and feed of their own flesh and blood, a company of such terrible creatures called lice, who instead of thanks, do reward them with pains, and torment them for giving them nourishment and food (*TBW* 144).

Though this passage is about microscopes, Cavendish provides a very compassionate perspective upon the poorest amongst the population, beggars. She reminds the reader that beggars have nothing to maintain themselves, yet must nonetheless provide food for others, fleas and lice, who give them much physical pain. This passage not only demonstrates much sympathy, but more importantly, the scientists who create microscopes are criticized for their lack of compassion since helping such beggars is deemed "below that noble study of microscopical observations" (*TBW* 144). Compassion towards the poor can also be found in *The Convent of Pleasure*, a play primarily concerned with the problems of aristocratic women. However, the sufferings of all women, regardless of class, are nonetheless depicted as women die

[78] See Whitaker 270, 326.
[79] James Fitzmaurice, "Notes and Documents: 'The Lotterie': A Transcription of a Manuscript Play Probably by Margaret Cavendish," *Hunting Library Quarterly* 66.1-2 (2003): 155-67.

in childbirth and experience abusive marriages; "From the Cobbler's wife we see,/ To Ladies, they unhappy be."[80]

Not only does Cavendish's literature at times demonstrate a concern for poverty, Cavendish's behavior can also be understood as subversive in relation to class propriety. She broke with the traditions of her class through her publishing.[81] Although some critics have interpreted her acts of publishing as being an aristocratic gesture, [82] nobility generally distributed their writings through manuscript. Whitaker argues that published scholarly debates particularly contrasted with aristocratic behavior, conventions and ideals.

> Virulent book wars were common amongst scholars, vying with each other to establish their own opinions and reputations. But polite society took no part in them. Gentlemen did not contradict each other, unless they wished to fight a duel, and William, like the rest of his class, despised scholarly disputations as 'a pedantical kind of quarreling, not becoming noble persons'[83]

Though perhaps not 'becoming' of her noble status, Cavendish enthusiastically participated in published scholarly debate, publishing numerous pieces that contradict and critique other scholars. However, it is not just Cavendish criticizing other intellectuals, she claims that she is "as willing to have [her] opinions contradicted, as

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[80] Margaret Cavendish, "Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, *The Convent of Pleasure*," *Women's Writing of the Early Modern Period, 1588-1688: An Anthology*, ed. Stephanie Hodgson-Wright (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002) 273.

[81] Cavendish broke with other class traditions as well. Her servant was both her close, affectionate friend and life long companion. Whitaker 16. However, "close relations between servants and the children of their well-to employers were usually frowned upon; servants, it was thought, could easily lead young people of the better sort astray" (David Booy, *Personal Disclosures: An Anthology of Self-writings from the Seventeenth Century*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002) 155).

[82] Hero Chalmers argues that Cavendish's decision to publish coincided with a royalist agenda since wifely self display could be used to affirm her husband's aristocratic status while Karen L. Raber claims that Cavendish's printing was a means for establishing and elevating her husband's and family's social position. See Hero Chalmers, "Dismantling the Myth of "Mad Madge": the cultural context of Margaret Cavendish's authorial self-presentation," *Women's Writing* 4.3 (1997): 323-39; Karen L. Raber, "'Our wits joined as in matrimony': Margaret Cavendish's Plays and the Drama of Authority," *English Literary Renaissance* 28.3 (1998): 464-493.

[83] Whitaker 264.

[she does] contradict others," demonstrating an active attempt to participate in the non-aristocratic book wars (*PL* sig. b1r).

XI. Parallel Realities

As Cavendish veers from class traditions, depicts sympathetic accounts of the poor and destabilizes theoretical justifications for monarchy, it becomes increasingly important to explore the meanings of her radical multi-voiced strategy. Although *The Blazing World* portrays numerous perspectives and is idiosyncratic in form and content, on an atomic level, the Blazing World has a method. Similar to atomic particles that are worlds in themselves, the worlds within the Blazing World, merge, conquer, unite, split, making infinite bodies with forms and consequently infinite realities that are connected together through matter. Since Cavendish perceives the physical body as no different from the body politic, and nature as always in a state of flux, governments, contracts and orders that hold worlds together are constantly in threat of dissolving and transforming into another order or body. If one imagines the Empress metaphorically as an atomic particle, then we can perceive the Empress discovering the Blazing World that was adjacent and connected to her previous world as an atom may split away from other atomic particles to unite to a different body. Since even thoughts are material within Cavendish's universe, the imagination is a physical space. Traveling through different worlds is made possible within this context. An author simultaneously exists in parallel realities as they become Gods of their imaginary, yet very physical, 'true' worlds. This is literally demonstrated by Cavendish as she creates herself as a character in the text who is able to enter into

and leave the textual world at ease. The expression that a writer's or a reader's mind is lost in their book becomes an actual reality as the writer literally and physically enters their fictional world. The two worlds are connected and the imagination becomes a political tool as the distinction between imagination and reality is collapsed. If the sovereign must always manipulate and conform the minds of the subjects, then the mind can be a political space and a subversive tool to counter power. Transgressing social reality or trying to understand the world from a different perspective is the domain of the active imagination. A text is not a closed boundary, but is an open and active locale, allowing subversive thought to become an actual physical, tangible world. Yet, the author becomes part of the world she or he creates challenging boundaries of fiction, imagination and reality. To make matters more complex, as the character "Margaret Cavendish" creates a world or reality, her creations can make worlds, that can make worlds, creating an unending labyrinth of infinite parallel realities since all of matter, including the imagination has a free-will of its own.

Hierarchy is made problematic within this system since the free-will within all of matter is what actively forms realities, demonstrating an emphasis upon the importance and equality of the individual which would appear incongruous with staunch royalist politics. Each individual's free-will could potentially disturb political structures as a disease may dissolve the physical body. Yet this free-will which causes so much discord, death and destruction paradoxically creates order, life and bodies. Cavendish collapses familiar dualisms such as death and life, order and disorder, challenging the way the world is understood. Free-will is natural and necessary for the universe or any universe to exist. The more the free-will is

exercised, the more realities are formed, creating a diverse natural world. More importantly though, using this free-will is not only necessary, but it pleases nature for "Nature loves variety, and this is the cause of all strange and unusual natural effects" (*PL* 391).

Analyzing Cavendish's work in context of her complex understanding of reality, multiple worlds and imagination could alter scholarly readings of her literature. For example, Sujata Iyengar argues that Cavendish advocates gender and race hierarchy in her science, yet her science fiction contradicts various theories of race and sex differences. Consequently, only in the imagination could people regardless of race or gender be complete, autonomous beings.[84] Yet, if the imagination is equally as 'real', material and significant as 'this' world, then an entirely different interpretation of her race and gender hierarchies emerges. Stevenson argues that "Cavendish's writings about the mind suggest that *everything* is thought and that all thought is the tangible figment of its own imagination."[85] This is an element of Cavendish's theory which needs further exploration. Rather than searching for one voice within Cavendish's texts, perceiving her literature as mirroring the infinitely diverse, contradictory and multifarious aspects of Nature, which is "all thought," scholarship will discover a plethora of intricate, complex and multi-layered ideas that redefine early modern culture in striking ways.

[84] Sujata Iyengar, "Royalist, Romancist, Racialist: Rank, Gender, and Race in the Science and Fiction of Margaret Cavendish," *English Literary History* 69.3 (2002): 649-671.
[85] Stevenson, "Imagining the Mind: Cavendish's Hobbesian Allegories," 144.

4

Contracts, Slaves and Chastity: Cavendish's Challenge to Absolutist Politics

As Cavendish presents multifarious perspectives in her text, occasionally some voices are overtly conservative. For example, the autobiography in *Nature's Pictures* declares that the parliamentarians "would have pulled God out of *Heaven*, had they had power, as they did Royaltie out of his Throne" (*NP* 377). However, at the same time, *Nature's Pictures* also explores highly radical political theories. Though scholarship understands Cavendish primarily as a hierarchical thinker in regards to class, critics have often recognized potentially subversive ideas within her work. When these radical aspects of Cavendish's thought are examined, they are generally dismissed as her own personal failure to maintain a consistent argument. For example, Victoria Kahn explores Cavendish's use of contractual theory as a metaphor for politics arguing that her contractual theory is problematic since it destabilizes sovereignty; her "defense of a more equitable marriage contract may in the end bring her closer to parliamentary critics of the king that she would have liked" particularly since she "shows almost in spite of herself that true romance is as much as a justification of personal and political divorce as it is of marriage."[1] Though Kahn's analysis is fascinating, her assumption is that Cavendish's royalist epistemology to some extent inadequately upholds her own political beliefs. Even

[1] Victoria Kahn, "Margaret Cavendish and the Romance of Contract," *Renaissance Quarterly* 50.2 (1997): 557.

the most recent criticism maintains this attitude. Geraldine Wagner argues that *The Blazing World* is a utopian experiment that fails because Cavendish cannot imagine alternatives to early modern utopian discourse which itself embodied conservative, even oppressive ideologies. Yet, Wagner notes that Cavendish depicts a political body with no sovereign head, but many multi-bodied, competing loci of potential agency.[2] Rather than exploring the meaning of this image, Wagner states that it is ironic given her monarchist politics.[3] Again, the radical aspects of her texts are assumed to be Cavendish's failure to remain consistent with her own politics. Critics have even noticed subversive elements in Cavendish's autobiography, which is arguably her most conservative work. Gweno Williams argues that the autobiography sets up a rigid truth/fiction dichotomy which demonstrates her loyalty to the monarchy. However, Williams claims that Cavendish later realizes this dichotomy is ultimately unworkable and her references to her readers in the autobiography suggest "some kind of preliminary recognition of the slipperiness of truth."[4] Since Williams acknowledges that this 'preliminary recognition' existed, she assumes it was a mistake, paralleling many critical interpretations that are based on the assumption that Cavendish blundered in her own political agenda, rather than considering the alternative; that Cavendish was deliberately exploring a radical political philosophy. Since Cavendish characteristically challenges and problematizes categories and epistemologies of all kinds, overlooking such 'failures' negates the

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[2] Geraldine Wagner, "Romancing Multiplicity: Female Subjectivity and the Body Divisible in Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 9.1 (2003): 9.1.
[3] Ibid. 1.
[4] Gweno Williams, "Margaret Cavendish, *A True Relation of My Birth, Breeding and Life,*" *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writings*, ed. Anita Pacheco (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002) 174.

possibility of a deliberate and complex engagement with seventeenth-century political thought.

As criticism begins contextualizing Cavendish, the more scholars are realizing that contrary to earlier scholarship, Cavendish was not an intellectual isolated from the ideas of her contemporaries, but was instead highly engaged with the intellectual debates of her time. Cavendish's work is arguably only truly understandable when seen as part of a complex dialogue with the intellectual milieu of the early modern period and her work becomes even more comprehensible when severed from the critical belief that she was staunchly dedicated to hierarchy. Although many scholars are now beginning to understand her as both scientist and literary figure, she was also heavily engaged with political theory. Many scholars have discussed Cavendish in comparison to Hobbes and contract politics, but have not placed Cavendish's work within context of a wider understanding of seventeenth-century political thought.[5] In *Nature's Pictures*, two stories, *The Contract* and *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*, explore some of the most significant theoretical dilemmas and debates that were shaping the early modern political system.

I. The Contract

As argued in previous chapters, Cavendish critiques social contracts arguing that they cannot control or subdue human nature. Yet, she devotes a whole short

[5] For more in depth discussions of the relationship between Cavendish and Hobbesian thought see Sarah Hutton, "In Dialogue With Thomas Hobbes: Margaret Cavendish's Natural Philosophy," *Women's Writing* 4:3 (1997): 353-67; Neil Ankers, "Paradigms and Politics: Hobbes and Cavendish Contrasted," *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish*, ed. Stephen Clucas (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003) 242-254.

story to the theme of contracts in *Nature's Pictures*. Though *The Contract* is specifically about matrimony, "the marriage contract was a charged metaphor for political obligation in the seventeenth century."[6] An explicit link between marriage and politics is construed in the text itself as the prince defines marriage in overtly political terminology.

> for I had, nor have no power to resign the interest I have in you, than Kings to resign their crown that comes by succession, for the right lies in the crown, not in the man, and though I have played the tyrant, and deserved to be uncrowned, yet none ought to take it off my head, but death, nor have I power to throw it from myself, death only must make way for a successor (*The Contract* 29).

This passage advocates a royalist position that not only indirectly condemns the execution of Charles I, but further suggests that similar to marriage between husband and wife, the position of king is such that neither subject nor sovereign has the right to alter the system. Mirroring the post revolution commitment to update the royalist stance that once political consent is given it can never be withdrawn, the story initially suggests that the contract between monarch and subjects cannot justifiably be broken. On the surface, the story as a whole appears to reflect a very pro-monarchy stance, particularly since, like the political contract in England, the original marital contract is broken and restored. Once the pair has grown into adults, they fall in love and the original contract is replaced by their affection, also demonstrating the "royalists' fantasy that the relation between sovereign and subject could never be one of simple coercion, but will always - also - be one of affection and consent."[7]

However, understanding the story as simply propagating idealistic royalist ideology becomes unsettled when we discover that the Duke is originally coerced

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[6] See Kahn 530.

into his contract. He claims he is contracted "not with a free consent of mind; but being forced by duty to my father, who did not only command, but threatened me with his curse" (*TC* 39). Rather than a relationship of mutual, affectionate consent, the Duke explains that he is forced since his "affections and free will renounced" the act (*TC* 39). Yet, this is not the only instance of forced covenants. Indeed, coercion and exploitation of contracts is a reoccurring theme throughout the text. For example, the contract between the Viceroy and Deletia is made

> without the young Lady's consent; but the uncle told her afterwards, she must prepare herself to be the Viceroy's bride: and, said he, if you consent not, never come near me more, for I will disclaim all the interest of an uncle, and become your enemy (*TC* 28).

In a society based upon patriarchal family structures, this is a significant threat, particularly for an unmarried woman. Since her uncle is the only family she has, without his favor, Deletia would have "*perished with shame*" and "*been left destitute*" (*TC* 24, 25). Though this threat is sinister, many contracts throughout the text are similarly created or broken out of fear of physical harm or violence. The Viceroy agrees to void his contract with Deletia (and as a consequence, later establishes a new contract) only because he is threatened with murder. To makes matters even more complicated, though Deletia later freely chooses the Duke, he threatens to kill her future husband in order to re-establish their previous contract. The story becomes a complex web of complicated contracts that are established through some form of coercion and force.

Victoria Kahn argues that *The Contract* demonstrates that Hobbesian contracts based upon fear, coercion and rational self-interest are weaker than the

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[7] Ibid. 541.

alternative model, contracts based upon love and affection. This is exemplified when romantic passions rule over the Prince's Hobbesian sense of self-preservation as he risks his life to break the contract between the Viceroy and Deletia. Even when the Viceroy argues that "you strike the King in striking me," the Prince is not deterred by fear of the sovereign or death itself, thus depicting that contracts of rational self-interest and preservation are not the most secure since passions can easily lead an individual to life-threatening, irrational actions. Furthermore, since the Viceroy breaks his contract out of fear of death, his actions reveal that contracts based upon fear and force are intrinsically unstable since an individual would always break contracts when threatened; "I must do a desperate act to set my hand to a bond I mean to break" (*TC* 31). Though the story does seem to emphasize covenants founded upon love and affection, Cavendish simultaneously demonstrates the instability of "Tyrant Love" (*TC* 43). Kahn argues that Cavendish paradoxically appropriates aspects of both conceptions of contracts since "coercion takes the form of our very own passions: we are coerced, in short, by ourselves."[8] Kahn further explains that this negotiation between two kinds of contracts is instigated by her agenda to revise absolute models of the marriage contract allowing a more equitable relation between husband and wife. Yet, she must precariously negotiate between a political dichotomy, for in emphasizing consent secured by affection, she runs the risk of justifying parliamentary critics of absolute sovereignty.[9] On the other hand, if romance and affection are merely coercion, she apologizes for an extreme absolutism. Though Kahn's interpretation is persuasive and the tale in many ways

[8] Ibid. 561.
[9] Ibid. 557.

appears as an analogy of the restoration of the monarchy within a revised sense of contractual obligation, the text still poses more questions than it answers, particularly since all types of contracts are depicted as unreliable.

Though *The Contract* portrays contacts based upon mutual love and consent as more effective than those motivated by force, love is still unsatisfactorily changeable within the text. Deletia claims that the relationship between the Prince and his wife was built upon "a wrong foundation, or rather castles in the air, as lovers use to do, which vanish soon away" (*TC* 40). Love and affection are problematically unstable emotions. The Prince "was forced by Tyrant Love to run in uncouth ways," indicating that emotions can temporarily displace free-will and rational judgment (*TC* 43). Though love is more binding than force in the text, it is still changeable and unreliable as a base for a contractual obligation, demonstrating Cavendish's belief that covenants cannot control or subdue human nature for "if men do not naturally agree, Art cannot make unity amongst them, or associate them into one Politick Body and so…rule them" (*PL* 47, 48).

II. Terms of Consent

The Contract systematically complicates and problematizes not only contract theory, but ultimately all the theoretical foundations that support a restoration. For example, many royalists believed that once a contract, whether political or marital, was established it could never legitimately be revoked. Royalist John Maxwell, argues that cancelling a contract between monarch and subject was as inappropriate as annulling a marriage.

> If it were granted that royalty in a King were by a contract betwixt him and his people, and revocable by the people upon the appearance of disadvantage, it cannot stand but in all inferior contracts of less concernment the like should hold. Is there any act more freely done than when a woman, not subject to paternal authority, of perfect age, under no guardian, maketh choice of an husband as she fancieth? And, I pray you, may she afterward shake him off at pleasure? God forbid[10]

Using the marriage contract as an example, Maxwell insinuates a sense of sexual immorality in relation to changing contracts. If a woman can leave a husband whenever she pleases, she is not only outside of patriarchal authority, but is not bound to ideals of marital chastity. There is something fickle and unchaste in changing contracts 'at pleasure'. Yet, in *The Contract*, Cavendish not only presents covenants constantly being revoked, but further depicts the problematic foundations of contractual obligation itself.

As *The Contract* represents various covenants being broken, the text explores the terms in which a contract can be legitimately established and under what conditions it continues to be valid. These were extremely politically significant issues at the time for the "statement of engagement, which was eventually required of all male citizens aged eighteen or over" sought to secure allegiance to the new government of Cromwell, giving "rise to a fast and furious pamphlet war debating the legitimacy of declaring allegiance to the new government when one had previously sworn obedience to the king."[11] Kahn argues that in Cavendish's text "the duke's breach of the original marriage contract, the engagement presented its would-

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[10] John Maxwell, "Sacro-sancta regum magestas," *Political Ideas of the English civil wars, 1641-1649*, ed. Andrew Sharp (London: Longman Group Limited, 1983) 113.

[11] Kahn 535. Nigel Smith defines the engagement controversy as "the attempt by Commonwealth propagandists to encourage the swearing of oaths of allegiance to the new state, and the resistance to this attempt" (Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 44). Interestingly, Cavendish was the second wife of her husband and on a

be subscribers with a case of conscience that involved conflicting moral allegiances and legal obligations."[12] However, since all contracts made by force are rendered void in the text and the only covenant that is judged to be legitimate is the one between the Duke and Deletia, which is derived by choice, the text suggests that only contracts that are established through consent without coercion can be valid, otherwise they can legally be repealed. Though Katharine Gillespie argues that Cavendish was against the possibility of divorce, marital or political – since, once consent is given, it is irrevocable - the Prince does actually divorce the only woman he is married to.[13] It is important to remember that his contract with Miseria is not marriage, but engagement. The question that the text poses to the reader is which contract is more valid and what criteria establishes this validity? These were politically pertinent questions since men that were consenting to Cromwell were revoking the previous contract with Charles. What conditions made Charles' contract revocable? Cavendish presents the initial engagement as being invalid until both parties gave their full consent, without coercion. Since the Duke's marriage was annulled because of affection for another, contracts are changeable, depending on the ongoing affection of the people. Likewise, a monarch's position would also only be valid with the "ongoing consent and affection of the partners which was not typical of royalist understandings of contract."[14] As a consequence, "royalist Cavendish

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personal level, she would have been confronted with the conflicts and anxieties caused by oaths of allegiance to a new contract.

[12] Kahn 535.

[13] Katharine Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century: English Women's Writing and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 130.

[14] Kahn 529.

ironically draws near to the parliamentarians' theory of an original and revocable contract between the people and their ruler."[15]

As Cavendish innovates within the traditional analogy between the marriage contract and politics, Gillespie argues that this is done to constitute women as 'representative political subjects'.[16] In order for women to be full subjects, Cavendish reiterates a commitment to absolutism by conceding and incorporating some of the more radical ideas about political obligation wagered by parliamentarians.[17] If this association with radicalism is a mistake, an unfortunate result in allowing women's subjectivity, then other aspects of the text would follow a conservative, royalist agenda. However, instances of absolutist doctrine being challenged are prevalent throughout the text. For example, the original contract is broken not only because the Duke was coerced, but also because Deletia was not an adult. She claims that she "was too young to remember him" (*TC* 7). Although Deletia claims a promise should never be revoked, the text poses the problem of the age of consent - how can a child consent to a political system? The Duke's current wife, claims that her marriage contract is the only valid agreement since the protagonist was

> too young to make a free choice, and to give a free consent. Besides, he doth disavow the act, by confessing the disagreeing thereto in his mind; and if she was to give a lawful consent, and his consent was seeming, not real, as being forced thereunto, it could not be a firm contract; wherefore, I beseech you, cast her suit from the bar, since it is of no validity (*TC* 40).

Deletia herself even argues that the contract is only made valid once she freely chooses as an adult and is of age of "knowing of good from evil" (*TC* 38). This

[15] Ibid. 530.
[16] Gillespie 123.
[17] Ibid. 129.

indicates that only adults can consent to a government since children have not yet developed their rational, moral facilities of judgment and cannot give free consent. This poses a crucial question, can an individual be bound to a contract, whether marital or political, that they did not consent to as an adult individual? Although the "theory of government by consent struck at the central doctrine of absolutism-the contention that kings derive their power from God alone,"[18] Cavendish more radically suggests that consent can only occur not only from the people, but from individual adults, problematizing both contract theory and a political system based upon hereditary rights.

III. Legislature and Hereditary Rights

The Contract becomes even more complicated when we learn that the marriage is also not between social equals; the Lady is "meanly born" or of lower social status than the Duke (*TC* 40). The text questions who has authority in this situation, the law or social superiors? The story ends with the law overthrowing the Duchess's marriage contract, not heeding her superior social position. Since the marriage contract is an analogy for the political contract, this indicates that a king is not above the law. Mirroring the anti-absolutist position which argued that the king was subject to the legislature, the conflicts in *The Contract* are settled in court, demonstrating that both the Duke and Duchess were subordinate to and regulated by the law alone. This contradicts absolutists such as Filmer who believe that a king

[18] J. P. Sommerville, *Royalists & Patriots: Politics and Ideology in England, 1603-1640*, 2nd ed. (London: Pearson Education Limited, 1999) 35.

cannot be tried in courts since the laws only existed to represent the king's will.[19] Executing Charles I was offensive enough, but to have tried him through a court system, was particularly disdainful to some. An anonymous elegy demonstrates the clash between absolutist ideology and the act of a King being judged in a court.

> *Kings* are *Gods once remov'd.* It hence appears
> No *Court* but *Heav'ns* can trie them by their *Peers*
> So that for *Charles the good* to have been try'd
> And cast by *mortall* Votes, was *Deicide.*
> No *Sinne*, except the *first*, hath ever past
> So black as this[20]

Killing and judging Charles in the courts is analogous to murdering God - it is a kind of deicide and with the exception of the fall, it is the worst sin a human can commit. If *The Contract* is, as some critics suggest, an analogy for the political relation between sovereign and subject, then the story advocates the anti-absolute doctrine that a monarch's power is limited and not above the law since all individuals in the story are judged according to a judicial, legal system. Though *The Contract* initially appears to oppose regicide or the breaking of contract between Charles I and his subjects, the text demonstrates that he is subject to judgment, just as Charles I was subject to the ruling of the courts that executed him. Rather than the law merely representing the will of the monarch, the law is an institution that all individuals, whether king or peasant, are subordinate to. The story even concludes with the Prince pronouncing that he "shall willingly submit" to the legal decision (*TC* 43). Kahn argues that since it is the husband rather than the wife that performs this gesture of submission, the text threatens traditional understandings of the marriage

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[19] Robert Filmer. "Patriarcha." *Filmer: Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 50.

[20] Anon., "*Caroli,*" *Monumentum Regale: Or a Tombe, Erected for the incomparable and Glorious Monarch, Charles I* (1649) qtd. in Smith 16.

contract as a justification of political subordination and absolute sovereignty.[21] As the Prince formally submits to inferiors, his actions reflect the parliamentarian belief that the monarch existed for the people, rather than the population existing for the monarch.

The text not only complicates notions of consent, contracts and legislature, but lineage is also questioned as Deletia argues she is "not from nobility, but [she] can draw a line of pedigree five hundred years in length from the root of merit, from whence gentility doth spring" (*TC* 40). This story that initially serves to reinstate rule by hereditary right, questions the basis of such a system as, paradoxically, Cavendish uses hereditary ideology to undermine it. Deletia claims she is noble due to bloodline, yet this is not related to titles or riches, but induced by a dynasty of 'merit'. Since merit is the supposed foundation of gentility, then nobility is a site that is opened to much larger interpretation. The reverse of this rationale would also suggest that this 'perjured and inconstant" Duke would taint or interfere with a dynasty of good behavior, interfering with his claims to power (*TC* 21). Deletia argues that "princes and monarchs do not always favour the most deserving, nor do they always advance men for merit, but most commonly otherwise, the unworthiest are advanced highest; besides, bribery, partiality, and flattery, rule princes and states." If the 'unworthiest' are most likely to be advanced, Deletia is thus overtly criticizing hierarchical titles, privileges and an entire system based upon lineage and noble superiority (*TC* 22).

[21] Kahn 556.

IV. Patriarchalism

Aristocratic lineage and status are not only questioned, but the protagonist must be disobedient to her father figure in order to re-establish the original order, challenging yet another foundation of absolutist thought. Many absolutists argued that though monarchical authority was derived from God, this power was fatherly in origin. This argument known as patriarchalism was based on the premise that the state was like a family. Filmer, a particularly acute defender of patriarchalism, argues that the first kings were actually fathers of families.

> As long as the first fathers of families lived, the name of patriarchs did aptly belong unto them. But after a few descents, when the true fatherhood itself was extinct and only the right of the father descended to the true heir, then the title of prince or king was more significant to express the power of him who succeeds only to the right of that fatherhood which his ancestors did naturally enjoy.[22]

Fathers and kings are essentially the same entity since the natural role of fathers evolved into kingship. Fatherly power is presented as natural and godly since it can be traced all the way back to Adam.

> I see not then how the children of Adam, or of any man else, can be free from subjection to their parents. And this *subjection* of children is the only fountain of all regal authority, by the ordination of God himself[23]

Since fathers are naturally not accountable to their wives or children, the King is also not accountable to the people. Sommerville argues that patriarchalism was meant not only to account for the origins of government, but also to prove that humans had not

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[22] Filmer 10.
[23] Ibid. 7.

been originally free, but were born into civil subjection.[24] However, the entire rationale of patriarchalism is founded not only upon hierarchy and obedience, but specifically upon dominating women and children. The patriarch's right to rule is based upon Adam's status as a father, and his ability to become a father rested upon marriage. Thus, the actual base of patriarchalism consisted of Adam's sexual or conjugal right to his wife. Because this necessarily preceded fatherhood, critics have argued that sexual dominance, rather than fatherhood, was actually the original base of patriarchalism.[25]

Though not all absolutists were necessarily patriarchalists, the belief in obedience was crucial to justify absolute doctrine. For example, royalist John Bramhall in 1643 argues "there is no one duty more pressed upon christians by Christ and his apostles than obedience to superiors."[26] Though the concept of obedience is necessary to staunch royalist ideology, in *The Contract*, superiors and fathers are constantly being disobeyed. This disobedience equally causes both disorder and order to the entire system. Although the Duke disobeys his father's wishes by ignoring his marriage contract, thereby disrupting order, in contrast, the Lady must disobey her uncle, her only patriarchal figure, to ultimately restore order once again. She claims to have been "*taught to obey superiors, and to reverence old age*," yet she nonetheless rebels against her uncle's wishes to marry another man (*TC* 41). Although her uncle "hath agreed with the Viceroy: and his word hath sealed that bond, which he will never break," this direct disobedience to a father and subversion

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[24] Sommerville 32.

[25] Gillespie argues that these theories derive from Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 1989. Gillespie 150.

[26] John Bramhall, "The serpent-salve," *Political Ideas of the English civil wars, 1641-1649*, ed. Andrew Sharp (London: Longman Group Limited, 1983) 54.

of his authority, ironically re-establishes the political order that is based upon a father's authority (*TC* 30). Perhaps Cavendish's critique of patriarchalism was influenced by Shakespeare since not only was she the first person, man or woman, to write at length about his work, but a similar theme of disobeying fathers in order to ironically maintain a patriarchal, feudal system can be seen in Shakespeare's *King Lear*.[27] The character Kent, who is later disguised as Caius, must disagree, disobey and ultimately deceive the King in order to serve him best and preserve his authority.[28] In a similar manner, patriarchal order is restored paradoxically by disobedience in *The Contract*. Royalist ideology is threatened and destabilized from multiple levels and perspectives, but is then safely placed back into order as the adult Deletia freely chooses to keep the original contract, creating an ending that ends potential political crisis and ultimately restores the original order.

V. Patriarchalism and Hierarchy in Assaulted and Pursued Chastity

Patriarchalism is also challenged in many of Cavendish other writings as well. Interestingly, in *The Blazing World*, a story about a woman's rise to absolute power, neither fathers nor Godly power are present within the text. However, when fathers do appear in Cavendish's literature, their status and relationships are more complex than metaphors for kings that naturally subjugate subjects for the benefit of society. For example, in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*, the protagonist, separated from her

[27] "*Sociable Letters* is now thought to be the first general prose assessment of Shakespeare's drama ever written" (Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle: Royalist, Writer and Romantic* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2002) 61).

biological family due to war, is initially without a father. As the narrative progresses, she discovers a father figure who adopts her as a son. Patriarchalism becomes confused within the context of adoption. He is not her natural, hereditary father and more importantly, he is also a shipmaster, of a lower class status than his 'son', complicating hierarchical and patriarchal structures. It is also a relationship about mutual affection, rather than complete authority since she is "adopted through compassion and affection" (*APC* 83). Although the idea of sovereign love coincides with the royalist belief of mutual affection, this relationship is instigated primarily through consent, without respect to titles, riches or hereditary rights. More remarkably, the logic of patriarchalism is reversed as her father inherits power from his daughter: "the reserve she gave her old father in charge to bring in," claiming that she gave him "this part to command, because I dare trust you faith, as well as your judgement, courage, and skill" (*APC* 96). This strikingly contradicts patriarchalists' understanding of authority. Filmer argues that only fathers can remit some of their authority to their sons.[29]

Filmer further claims that this fatherly power includes the right to defend the whole family or commonwealth.

> the king, as father over many families, extends his care to preserve, feed, clothe, instruct and defend the whole commonwealth. His wars, his peace, his courts of justice and all his acts of sovereignty tend only to preserve and distribute to every subordinate and inferior father, and to their children.[30]

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[28] Kent expresses this contradiction as he states "Now, banished Kent,/ If though canst serve where thou dost stand condemned" (William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, ed. Jay L. Halio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 120).

[29] Filmer "It is the favour, I think, of the parents only, who, when their children are of age and discretion to ease their parents of part of their fatherly care, are then content to remit some part of their fatherly authority" (Filmer 18).

[30] Ibid. 12.

Ironically, Miseria appropriates this fatherly role. She instructs and defends the nation and distributes power to others, demonstrating that stately power and successful state craft is not gender specific or limited to fathers.

As the logic of patriarchalism is challenged and disrupted within the text, other aspects of royalist ideology are also questioned. When the protagonist, now called Travellia, has assumed the lowest and most demeaning of all social categories, the position of slave, she nearly inherits an entire kingdom as the queen declares "if I die, be you heir to my crown, and ruler of my people" (*APC* 92). The absolute binary of sovereign and slave is collapsed as slave and sovereign become one entity. Paralleling the circumstances of her adoption, Travellia's newly acclaimed position is obtained without biological lineage, titles or wealth, reversing traditional feudal methods of interpreting and organizing social and economic relations. Although the universe was often viewed as an orderly hierarchical structure, or "Great Chain of Being," in which each part was related by correspondence or analogy to all other parts,"[31] *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* demonstrates the disorder and disruption of all hierarchical social relations, rather than a fixed, harmonious, universal order.

The concept of a harmonious "Great Chain of Being" is also challenged as Cavendish demonstrates the tyranny and horror that can occur within a political system based upon absolute right. Through her travels, she discovers a nation where the aristocracy enslave and cannibalize their own people.

> for they had a custom in that country, to keep great store of slaves, both males and females, to breed on, as we do breed flocks of sheep, and other cattle[.] The children were eaten as we do lambs or veal, for young and tender meat; the elder for beef and mutton, as stronger meats; they kill five males for one female, for fear of destroying the breed, although they were so fruitful: they

[31] Sommerville 52.

> never bear less than two at a birth[,] and many times three, and they seldom leave child-bearing, until they are threescore years old, for they usually live there until they are eight score, and sometimes two hundred years (*APC* 69)

Rather than experiencing patriarchal protection and authority, the people in this world suffer absolute brutality. The peoples' suffering and humiliation is heightened by an extended life span which made it possible that a person could be enslaved in such a condition for up to two hundred years. This depiction of the aristocracy is far from portraying a caring, fatherly government or a mutual affection between sovereign and subject, but like *The Blazing World*, it demonstrates a humanity that has an unquenchable desire to master and conquer others. If a monarchy does not protect the people from the worst of atrocities, than how can such a system be justified as the only suitable form of government? Filmer argues that monarchy is the best form of government because it provides the most liberty

> The greatest liberty in the world (if it be duly considered) is for people to live under a monarch. It is the Magna Carta of this kingdom. All other shows or pretexts of liberty are but several degrees of slavery, and a liberty only to destroy liberty.[32]

However, the subjects of this nation are deprived of the status of humans as they are not only cannibalized and bred as animals, but they are hunted for sport: "their exercise was hunting, where the women hunted the females, the men the males" (*APC* 65). They exist in a state worse than slavery since all areas of early modern culture, whether it was theology, humanism or science, represented animals as the antithesis of the human.[33] To assert or demonstrate human supremacy, writers discussed the inferiority of animals.[34] Erica Fudge argues that this attitude can be

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[32] Filmer 4.
[33] Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Champaigne: University of Illinois Press, 2002) 4.
[34] Ibid. 4.

perceived even in law where there was a humanizing status attributed to ownership; humans were differentiated from animals through the categories owner and owned. Possession of animals reveals the owner's human capacity for reason.[35] Yet, if to be human is to possess and own, than what are subjects that are not only brutalized, but enslaved by their ruler?

VI. Slavery and Chastity

As the story portrays a kingdom of slavery, Cavendish depicts the problems with unlimited powers of rulers. If the people have no property, no rights and do not have control over their own bodies, than how can they be subjects? Even Hobbes argued that subjects can defend themselves from an absolute monarch if their lives were endangered, but Cavendish further demonstrates that defending the body itself is also necessary. In an anonymous anti-absolutist pamphlet printed in 1643, the metaphor of chastity is used to encourage resistance to political authority if common safety is jeopardized.

> it is lawful to defend themselves against any private man that would offer violence to their chastity. Neither can any law of any country justly deny this; for chastity is an inherent good, of which there can be no pretence why any should be robbed or deprived of it.[36]

A subject cannot be denied the right to defend his or her chastity. However, the concept of chastity is also linked with property rights within this pamphlet since "God nowhere disallows absolutely the defence of our very goods, and so of our

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[35] Ibid. 124.

[36] Andrew Sharp, ed., "A few propositions shewing the lawfulnesse of defence against the injurious attempts of outrageous violence," *Political Ideas of the English civil wars, 1641-1649* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1983) 69.

persons, from the outrages of any private violence."[37] The same association between property and chastity are made when Miseria uses the language of property rights to persuade the Prince that his attempted rape is not lawful "for why should you rob me of that which Nature freely gave? And it is an injustice to take the goods from the right owners without their consent" (*APC* 52). Through arguing against rape within the discourse of property rights, Cavendish is referring to a topic that was repeatedly discussed throughout seventeenth-century politics. Should a monarch have an absolute right over property and, if so, what are the consequences?

Since slavery was permitted in the British empire, many people discussed the theoretical dilemma of property in defining slaves, also known as 'villeins'.[38] Many understood the distinction between subjects and slaves as being defined by their property rights. The vast majority of subjects were considered to have free status and to deprive an individual of property was to reduce them of the status of slave. For example, slaves may occupy and work on property, but this right could be canceled by the king at any time. In 1610, Thomas Hedley argued that there "is great difference betwixt the kings free subjects and bondmen' since 'the king may by commission at his pleasure seize the lands or goods of his villeins (*villani*), but so can he not of his free subjects."[39] In contrast, absolutists conventionally allowed for the sovereign to ultimately have authority over property. As long as slavery existed in the kingdom and remained a theoretical possibility, anti-absolutist arguments were consequently based upon questions of ownership. Individuals' property rights were often a defended liberty since if this right was broken, other liberties might prove

[37] Ibid. 69.
[38] Sommerville 137.

indefensible.[40] A monarch, who could tax at will against the people's wishes, would have the financial resources to disregard the rights of his subjects.[41] Furthermore, if an absolute sovereign had the right to make laws without consent from the subjects, the established regulations on ownership could be altered; consequently questions of lawmaking, property and slavery were linked by this logic.[42] It is thus no coincidence that Cavendish not only links the defense of chastity with property within the text, but further depicts various horrific forms of slavery.

Although the story takes place safely in a fantasy setting, seemingly far from England, Cavendish does make a parallel that initially appears as an innocent comparison:

> these of the royal blood all their skins were wrought, like the Britons. As for their government, it was tyrannical, for all the common people were slaves to the royal (*APC* 69).

Cavendish brings England into her fantasy world to innocuously describe the natives' skin which is comparable to the 'Britons'.[43] Yet, in the next statement, without a transition sentence or phrase, she describes their government as tyrannical where the subjects are enslaved. Though England is not directly criticized, the text juxtaposes natives of England alongside tyrannical nobility, leaving an association with the reader. Furthermore, the cannibalized, enslaved kingdom is not an isolated instance of national slavery in the text. The "vulgar people who were rather slaves than subjects" are subjects of the King's domain (*APC* 89). In portraying multiple

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[39] Thomas Hedley, *The origins of English individualism: the family, property and social transition*, (1978) 192, qtd. in Sommerville 137.
[40] Sommerville 134-140.
[41] In fact the first two Stuart kings levied taxes without the consent of Parliament. See Ibid. 140.
[42] Ibid. 134-140.
[43] Britons are historically defined as the race of people "who occupied the southern part of the island at the Roman invasion, the 'ancient Britons'" (*OED* 563).

kingdoms of slavery, while reminding the reader of England, Cavendish is perhaps suggesting that an absolute monarch's power should be curbed.

Since the aristocracy does not protect the people from the worst atrocities, the story resembles some Republican arguments. Parliamentarian Henry Parker argues that a monarch "was created to preserve the commonalty; the commonalty was not created for his service."[44] Cavendish demonstrates the problems with absolutist understandings of authority. If the position of sovereign does not exist to preserve the people, than absolute power will transform into absolute brutality. Since her literature portrays humans as having an unquenchable thirst for domination and mastery, it would be inevitable that rulers would try to obtain ultimate and complete mastery over their subjects, transforming subjecthood to brutal slavery. Unlike the royalist arguments that argued monarchy prevents the worst possible fate of anarchy, Cavendish depicts the worst situations occurring within orderly government.

VII. Slavery and Royalist Politics

Though critics have never discussed in depth the meaning of slavery in Cavendish's text, it is a recurring and prominent theme in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*. Not only is the protagonist enslaved twice, the prospect of entire nations becoming forced into slavery is a constant threat. References to slavery are mentioned a total of eighteen times within this short story and even the queen "who

[44] Henry Parker, "Observations upon some of his majesties late answers and expresses," *Political Ideas of the English civil wars, 1641-1649*, ed. Andrew Sharp (London: Longman Group Limited, 1983) 137.

was an absolute Princess" is enslaved twice through both violent conquest and love (*APC* 86).

> O what a Hell it is to love, and not be loved again! Nay not only to love, but to love a slave, and he regards me not. Do I say, slave? No, he is none that hath no slavish passion: then he is free (*APC* 102).

The distinctions between monarch/slave and free/enslaved are collapsed and confused as the text demonstrates that the absolute power of the Queen cannot control the will or affections of not only her inferiors, but her own self.

Though the story demonstrates a preoccupation with defining both freedom and slavery, anti-slavery sentiments were not necessarily synonymous with anti-royalist thought. Nicholas Hudson argues that conservative royalists were the first to instigate an anti-slavery movement and after the Restoration, royalist authors often protested the "slavery" which was imposed upon the British people by the Puritans.[45] While "Whigs routinely accused Tories of wanting to "enslave" Britains, they themselves had made the heaviest political and economic investments in the mercantile class that prospered from the slave-trade."[46] The royalists, in contrast, were far more disposed ideologically and economically to find sympathy with the victims of British mercantile enterprise.[47]

This inclination for royalists to sympathize with victims of slavery is exemplified by Aphra Behn in *Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave*. The text provides a powerfully compassionate perspective on the enslaved protagonist, Oroonoko. Far

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[45] Nicholas Hudson, "'Britons Never Will be Slaves': National Myth, Conservatism, and the Beginnings of British Antislavery," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34.4 (2001): 559, 561.
[46] Ibid. 562.
[47] Ibid. 562. Hudson further demonstrates how groups who would seem most opposed to slavery were often active participants. For example, in the "richest slave-trading port in the West of England, Bristol, the percentage of dissenters was twice the national average, and the Whig government of the city was dominated by Presbyterian and Quaker merchants" (Ibid. 561).

from being dehumanized, she claims "the most illustrious courts could not have produced a braver man, both for greatness of courage and mind, a judgment more solid, a wit more quick, and a conversation more sweet and diverting."[48] Oroonoko who had formerly been a great Prince of an African nation is tricked into slavery, after his lover, Imoinda, is sold into the slave market. Slavery is portrayed as the worst human condition, the "most disgraceful of any; and to which they a thousand times prefer death, and implore it."[49]

Though Behn was a royalist, *Oroonoko* influenced the abolition of the British slave trade.[50] However, the text is problematic when understood entirely as providing an anti-slavery stance since Oroonoko himself was a Prince who had formally trafficked slaves and this practice is never critiqued in the text. Furthermore, Oroonoko never regrets or reflects upon his own practice of enslaving others. Oroonoko's ideological position can be better understood as he rallies the other slaves to revolt.

> should we be slaves to an unknown people? Have they vanquished us nobly in fight? Have they won us in honorable battle? And are we, by the chance of war, become their slaves? This would not anger a noble heart, this would not animate a soldier's soul; no, but we are bought and sold like apes or monkeys[51]

Though he urges revolt in this passage, Oroonoko is not entirely advocating an anti-slavery stance. Rather, he argues against the specific form of slavery. The distinction is one of class politics. Being won 'honorably' in battle is considered acceptable, but

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[48] Aphra Behn, "Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave. A True History," *Women's Writing of The Early Modern Period, 1588-1688: An Anthology*, ed. Stephanie Hodgson-Wright (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002) 319.

[49] Ibid. 333.

[50] "Compassion for the royal slave and outrage at his fate were enlisted in the long battle against the slave trade" (M. H. Abrams, ed. "Aphra Behn, 1640?-1689," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. 1, 7th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000) 2167).

to be bought and sold as commodities by merchants is disgraceful. Slavery is only honorable if slaves are prisoners of war within a feudal system, but is not acceptable when practiced within a mercantile economy.

The merchant class during the early modern period was becoming an increasingly looming economic and political threat as their slave enterprises expanded and the merchants became a real economic force. As merchants became wealthy, boundaries between aristocracy and the middle class were becoming blurred and the ideology within *Oroonoko* demonstrates the anxiety induced by the shifting of wealth that the slave trade caused. Throughout the text, merchants continually turn the feudal system upside down, disordering hierarchical relations. The socially inferior merchants trick Oroonoko and his court, forcing them into slavery and until he meets Trefry, an 'honorable' slave-trader, his aristocratic status is not respected by the slave-owners. In contrast, Oroonoko respects the aristocratic status of conquered nobles and when he captures an aristocrat

> he never put him amongst the rank of captives, as they used to do, without distinction, for the common sale or market; but kept him in his own court, where he retained nothing of the prisoner but the name.[52]

The text depicts common or shared nobility, regardless of race or ethnicity. Hence, royal lineage and status should not be disregarded, even during the circumstances of war.

Although it is not unusual for a royalist to take an anti-slavery stance, Cavendish's position is strikingly different from Behn's. Rather than merchants, it is the nobility that are the tyrannical slave owners who exploit and enslave the

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[51] Behn 356, 357.
[52] Ibid. 335.

peasantry. Not only do the various aristocracies presented in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* enslave subjects, but the Prince himself "was a grand monopolizer of young virgins" who participated in the trafficking of women (*APC* 50).[53] Although slavery "offered a compelling symbol of how the traditionally benign relationship between lord and peasant had been deformed into tyranny by rampant commercial greed" the tyranny is reversed as the traditional 'benign' relationship is displayed as a vicious and consuming force.[54]

Not only is Behn's depiction of slavery ideologically distinct from Cavendish, but her understanding of identity dramatically differs. Oroonoko can never sever himself from his royal persona. When Oroonoko wears the clothing of and plays the role of a common slave, there was nonetheless still something divine and extraordinary about him.

> Nevertheless, he shone through all; and his osenbrigs (a sort of brown holland suit he had on) could not conceal the graces of his looks and mien, and he had no less admirers than when he had his dazzling habit on. The royal youth appeared in spite of the slave, and people could not help treating him after a different manner, without designing it. As soon as they approached him, they venerated and esteemed him; his eyes insensibly commanded respect, and his behavior insinuated it into every soul. So that there was nothing talked of but this young and gallant slave, even by those who yet knew not that he was a prince[55]

Regardless of the clothing he wears, Oroonoko is King and his identity is fixed. This divine, static self even affects other people as he seems to have an almost natural power over others.

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[53] Since the Prince was involved in enslaving and prostituting women, Miseria was very fortunate that she was not immediately sold; the Prince; "sent for his chief officer the old bawd to know of her how his customers increased, which when she came, she told him she had a rich prize, which she had seized on, and kept only for his use" (*APC* 50).

[54] Hudson 562.

[55] Behn 341, 342.

Unlike Behn's conception of the royal self, Cavendish depicts a changeable identity based upon performance, rather than class. Class boundaries are fluidly crossed and redefined as the protagonist of *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* strikingly transforms from Lady, page, slave, god, human sacrifice, son, daughter, general, vice-regent and queen, demonstrating a plethora of roles that one single person can play. The Prince creates a parallel plot narrative that also explores self-fashioning as he transforms into pirate, prisoner, commander of an army and Prince once again. Both characters successfully role-play their various parts, demonstrating a multiplicity of selves that exist within one individual, while simultaneously portraying the fragility of social status and positions. Identity is founded upon cultural constructs to be performed rather than innate, fixed structures. Rather than a self that is static, derived from outside forces beyond human control, the self emerges from within the individual, demonstrating a dynamic and changeable identity. This self becomes a type of individualism where the individual can potentially play vast amounts of roles and performances not being restricted by class boundaries. The sovereign itself is not immune to an identity that is in constant flux.

> [fortune] gives oft times the beggar's lot to the King, the servants' to the masters, the masters' to the servants: and for the internal gifts which the gods have bestowed on men, are different, as the external are transitory (*APC* 73).

Similar to the class and gender interchanges performed by Miseria, these transformations occur in the theater of life as well. Power and status alter due to the transitory forces of fortune and even kings may play the role of servant, demonstrating a fragile hierarchy, subject to chance and change.

A fluid, changing identity that is subject to fortune fundamentally contradicts the 'Great Chain of Being'. Royalist propagandist Peter Heylyn, explains how the "Great Chain of Being" demonstrates that obedience is necessary.

> There is a golden chain in polities, and every link thereof hath some relation and dependence on that before. So far forth as inferior magistrates do command the people according to that power and those instruments which is communicated by them the supreme prince, the subject is obliged to submit unto them without any manner of resistance[56]

If identity and status are always in flux, than it would be difficult to not only define but pin down the relation between various hierarchical links. As class boundaries are confused and transgressed, the relations in the great chain of being are complicated and confused; obedience is challenged. Rebellion is less difficult to determine if there is no fixed master.

Though *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* presents a sense of identity that is in constant flux, Line Cottegnies argues that in Cavendish's autobiography, she uses various strategies to celebrate the unshakable stability of the self.[57] Cottegnies further claims that this emphasis upon heroic, stable selfhood naturally takes on a political dimension as Cavendish characteristically demonstrates her loyalty and constancy to the royalist cause.[58] If the construction of a stable self indicates loyalty to royalist politics, than how are readers to interpret the constant shifting of identity in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*? Interestingly, Cottegnies reveals a contradiction in her argument as she concedes that "Cavendish almost schizophrenically adopts

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[56] Peter Heylyn, "The rebells catechism," *Political Ideas of the English civil wars, 1641-1649*, ed. Andrew Sharp (London: Longman Group Limited, 1983) 59.

[57] Line Cottegnies, "'The "Native Tongue" of the "Authoress': The Mythical Structure of Margaret Cavendish's Autobiographical Narrative," *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish*, eds. Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003) 112. Williams also perceives a relation between a stable self and royalism. See Williams 165-176.

two different perspectives on herself at once."[59] This 'schizophrenic' moment suggests that Cavendish is not presenting a mythic stable self, but like many other critics, Cottegnies interprets aspects of her literature that do not portray staunch royalist sentiments as Cavendish's own failure to remain consistent to her politics; or in this case, mental disorder. In stark contrast, Mary Beth Rose claims that Cavendish's autobiography "fails to merge, to make connections which pointedly fractures her construction of her identity" and that she has an "unwillingness to settle on a point or commit herself to an idea."[60] Yet, perhaps this 'unwillingness' to settle on a perspective, is an indication of a deliberate illustration of the unstable self. A self that is constantly changing, fracturing and that is unable to consolidate into one fixed perspective parallels the self portrayed in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* which is fluidly shifting into various manifestations of the social hierarchy all the way from slave to God, not hindered or defined by static, internal, class hierarchies.

Though the self is depicted as a performance in flux rather than containing an innate class identity, critic Kate Lilley argues that Cavendish's royalist tenets for a rigid class structure are prominent within *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*. Lilley argues that the population within the discovered world is "hierarchically colour-coded" since there are profound physical differences between nobility and peasants.[61]

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[58] Cottegnies 112.
[59] Ibid. 114.
[60] Rose further argues with reference to Anne Halkett 's *Memoirs* (written 1677-8), that Halkett displays the firmest grasp of the unified self. However, the premise of Rose's argument is that a whole unified self is the objective. Yet, it is anachronistic to judge writers on their ability to portray a unified whole since the modern, insular and individual self is a concept which developed later. See Mary Beth Rose, *Gender and Heroism in Early Modern English Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002) 64, 65. For more insight into Halkett's conception of self see Anne Halkett, "The Memoirs of Anne, Lady Halkett," *The Memoirs of Anne, Lady Halkett and Ann, Lady Fanshawe*, ed. John Loftis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 9-87.
[61] Kate Lilly, Introduction, *Margaret Cavendish: The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1994) xxi.

Lilley is correct in that the two classes appear as two distinct species for "all those of the royal blood, were of a different colour from the rest of the people, they were of a perfect orange colour, their hair coal black" (*APC* 68). In contrast the skin of the peasants is "of a deep purple" (*APC* 63). Although this appears like a conservative, royalist fantasy, the specific coloring of the peasants is strikingly subversive. The color purple has traditionally been associated since ancient times as a symbol of royalty and authority. Sumptuary legislature which regulated the personal lives of people between the 14th and 17th centuries, forbade all but highest ranking in society from wearing purple.[62] Frances Baldwin asserts that few "things help us more effectively to realize the regimentation of mediaeval and early modern society in England than do the sumptuary laws of the period. Every costume was to some extent a uniform revealing the rank and condition of its wearer."[63] Sumptuary laws not only regulated color, but fabrics also were used to designate class distinctions and silk was a material that signified royalty almost as much as purple.[64] It is thus significant that the peasants wear a material made from barks of trees that "looked as fine as silk, and as soft" (*APC* 63). The peasants' hair is "as white as milk, and like wool" which would perhaps remind seventeenth-century readers of the elaborate white wigs "the crowning glory of a man's appearance," often made of animal hair and worn by the upper classes (*APC* 63).[65] Though sumptuary laws were curbed by the 1604, the idea in principle, of some kind of sumptuary legislation remained in the

[62] Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* (London: Butler & Tanner Ltd., 1990).
[63] Frances Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England*, diss. John Hopkins University 1923, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1926) 53.
[64] Ibid. 228-229.
[65] Ribeiro 90.

minds of many people later in the century.[66] It is thus significant that the royalty had orange skin since an orange skin could potentially indicate tanned skin on people of European descent. People who work or labor outdoors could appear of an orange, tawny complexion. Far from portraying a hierarchical color-coded society, hierarchical coloring is reversed as the peasants embody traditional emblems of the highest royalty while the aristocracy is the color of laborers. Like the representation of gold and gems in *The Blazing World*, value is not inherent to an individual or an object; it is the community at large that externally places meaning and value upon objects.

VIII. Tyrannicide and Self-Defense

As Cavendish explores class identity, she also examines arguments that would limit absolute power. When Miseria claims that it is "an injustice" to take an individual's chastity "without their consent," she creates an argument that would limit the power of absolute sovereignty and provide justifications for resistance to monarchical oppression (*APC* 52). Miseria, now called Travellia, declares to her army that all "noble spirits hate bondage, and will rather die than endure slavery" (*APC* 97, 98). Since she further claims that "no danger ought to be avoided, nor life considered, in respect of their honours", Cavendish is arguing that all measures should be taken to ensure that an individual is not a slave to the King (*APC* 115). This resembles parliamentarian Parker who argues that "if all nations, by common consent, can neither set limits or judge limits set to sovereignty, but must look upon

[66] Ibid. 87.

it as a thing merely divine and above all human consent or comprehension, then all nations are equally slaves."[67] Since the protagonist argues that people should fight rather than endure slavery, monarchs do not have absolute right over their subjects.

Though Miseria argues that there are limits to sovereignty, this is done within the context of rape. The story begins with a slave, Miseria, attempting to kill a 'tyrant' and 'devil' prince in order to defend herself from sexual assault (*APC* 52). Miseria justifies her action claiming that

> it is no sin to defend myself against an obstinate and cruel enemy, and know said she, I am no ways to be found [] by wicked persons but in death; for whilst I live I will live in honour, or when I kill or be killed I will kill or die for security (*APC* 52).

Since the term Prince could also indicate a sovereign, Cavendish is verging on justifications for tyrannicide arguing that an individual is allowed to kill a Prince to defend personal security and honor. Since chastity is understood in terms of property, and the doctrine that subjects could never justifiably use force against the king was the most commonly expressed political principle in early Stuart England,[68] this radically suggests that subjects denied property rights could legitimately fight back. Miseria's argument for self-preservation resembles Parker who claims that if the lives of people are endangered they are "absolved of all obedience" so that they can "seek their own preservation by resistance and defence."[69] Miseria not only justifies, but encourages the concept of self-defense as she reasons that "the gods would not hear her, if she lazily called for help and watched for miracles neglecting natural

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[67] Parker, "Some few observations upon his majesties late answer to a declaration...of May 1642," *Political Ideas of the English civil wars, 1641-1649*, ed. Andrew Sharp (London: Longman Group Limited, 1983) 133.
[68] Somerville 38.
[69] Parker specifically uses the example of a general turning his cannon upon his own soldiers to prove this point. See Parker "Observations upon some of his majesties late answers and expresses" 138.

means" (*APC* 50). It is lazy or even immoral to expect divine help when one should be resourceful and defend their person. This contradicts absolutists such as Bramhall who argues that as "we suffer with patience an unfruitful year, so we must do an evil prince sent by God."[70] Like famines and natural disasters, a tyrannical Prince is sent by God above and the people have no choice or ability to resist their fate. Filmer also claims that inferiors can never disobey or resist even if their master commands them to sin. The sin becomes the sin of the master and not the servant; hence obedience is more important than individual moral judgment.[71]

As absolutists argued that even tyrannical monarchs should be obeyed, they nonetheless claimed that sovereigns who misused their power would be punished, but that this punishment was by God alone.[72] However, in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*, it is not God who punishes the tyrannical king, but Travellia, the former slave. Not only does she punish the monarch, she also judges and decides his sentence.[73] This indicates that inferior subjects, whether woman or slave, not only have the right to self-defense, but can also judge the actions of a sovereign. In context of the civil war, this controversially suggests that subjects may have had the right to judge Charles I.

If people have the right to judge and resist a tyrant, than what are the implications for hierarchy? Historian Tim Stretton claims that early modern culture legally understood the family as the foundation for the state.

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[70] Bramhall 55.
[71] Filmer 43, 44. Filmer even goes as far as to suggest that fathers have absolute right over their children's lives and the law cannot interfere with this prerogative. Since fathers and kings are understood as the same, according to this logic, than the King would also have absolute right over his subject's lives as well. Ibid. 18.
[72] Sommerville 42.
[73] See *APC* 104,105.

> In a society where moral and political philosophers regarded households as the essential building blocks of the state - as mini monarchies that nurtured and policed hierarchical bonds of respect, deference and obligation - public authority depended on domestic order. And to maintain an orderly household, writers argued, a patriarch had to have power not just over his children and servants but over his wife[74]

This belief can be perceived in early modern legislature regarding domestic homicide. A man who was guilty of murder might simply hang, but a wife who killed her husband, servants who killed their masters or children who killed their fathers were further guilty of petty treason, and might be burned at the stake.[75] It is thus significant that a female character voices revolutionary arguments regarding self-defense and justifications for tyrannicide. Although Miseria was not married to the Prince, she was unquestionably a slave. She had been bought by an old woman who in turn intended to prostitute her and "meant to sell [her] at a high rate" (*APC* 50). If the lowest members of society, females, prostitutes and slaves, can justifiably defend themselves and kill a tyrannical ruler, than other people such as a wife could also resist her husband, contradicting legislature which stated that even if a woman killed her husband in self-defense, she committed petty treason.[76]

The text not only provides justifications for social inferiors to defend their persons, but entire nations are encouraged to defend themselves against tyranny.

> if we let our enemies become our masters; they will give us restless fears, unreasonable taxes, unconscionable oaths, whereby we shall lose the peace of our minds, the conversation of our friends, the traffic with our neighbours, the plenty of our land, the form of our customs, the order of our ceremonies, the liberty of a subject (*APC* 97)

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[74] Tim Stretton, "Women, Property and Law," *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. Anita Pacheco (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002) 43.
[75] Ibid. 43.
[76] Gillespie 172.

Though this passage depicts fear of being conquered culturally through loss of customs and ceremonies, unreasonable taxes are also explicitly linked with tyrannical rule. If a monarch can tax at will, than the liberty of the subject will be affected since this will cause among many problems, the ability to trade and own land. If subjects do not have control of their land and property, than how can they be defined as free subjects?

Self-defense is also encouraged as Travellia, now a military general, argues that women will be enslaved if the Queen remains captured; "your wives and children will be bought and sold, and you be forced to do their servile work; what goods you now possess, your enemies will enjoy" (*APC* 95). The above passage suggests that conquered nations are no more than slaves. This is significant since most theorists in the earlier part of the seventeenth-century admitted that there was one method for a ruler to legitimately gain absolute power: conquest. There could be no contract or consent from a conquered population, so the power was absolute. "Unfortunately, there was rather strong historical evidence that England had been conquered, by Charles's ancestor William of Normandy" which could indicate that he did in fact have the right to absolute power.[77] Challenging this principle, Cavendish argues that sovereign right derived from conquest is not legitimate and the population should fight back.

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[77] Sommerville 65. Not only was conquest considered a legitimate justification for power, both royalist and parliamentarians believed that political legitimacy was dependent on the origins of the regime in question. Cavendish contradicts both sides of the argument in Miseria's claim that history cannot provide truth; for history is "seldom writ in the time of action, but a long time after, when truth is forgotten" (*APC* 55). If history can not represent a past reality, than it cannot be used to prove political legitimacy. See Andrew Sharp, "The Range of Possible Origins, and the Choice," *Political Ideas of the English civil wars, 1641-1649*, ed. Andrew Sharp (London: Longman Group Limited, 1983) 132.

IX. Slavery and Gender

In its acute arguments for self-defense, *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* increasingly aligns itself with republican ideology since the text continually portrays enslaved subjects. However, since women in early modern England were not legally subjects or citizens and had limited property rights, it is significant that the women in the text suffer the most loss of control over their personal bodies. Women experience not only slavery and cannibalism, but constantly either experience or are threatened with rape. In the kingdom where cannibalism was practiced, some women of the peasantry would have potentially experienced a two hundred year lifetime of sexual abuse, along with forced breeding since "their women were common to everyone's use, unless it were those women of the royal blood" (*APC* 69). Though an exception is made on the basis of class, the aristocracy of this world takes, violates and exploits bodies of women, just as the Prince attempts to take and violate the body of Miseria (and later plots to steal and exploit women for his pirates). As Cavendish explores a tyrannical aristocracy that is ever consuming its enslaved people in various, horrific forms, she further depicts the female body not only as site of violent enslavement and violation, but as something that is consumed in every way possible.

It is significant that Cavendish explores female slavery and exploitation since slavery was so important to political thought. The vast majority of subjects were considered to have free status and this status was dependent on the right to own property. However, women did not have equal rights to property. Although there were various loopholes in legislature, women ultimately were denied the property

rights that were available to men.[78] Mary Carleton, in her defense against charges of bigamy, dramatizes the sinister aspects of married women's legal position as she complains that her husband "and his agents divested and stripped of all my clothes, and plundered of all my jewels, and my money, my very bodice, and a pair of silk stockings, being also pulled from me."[79] Carleton's husband legally had the right to behave this way. When a woman married, all of her personal property, including the clothes she stood in, became her husband's outright, along with any gifts or monies she earned during marriage.[80] Since women were also expected to be silent, obedient and chaste, Cavendish juxtaposes the ideal of female chastity with the discourse of property rights, demonstrating that within this theoretical framework, women were slaves in England. Like slaves, women were objects of exchange between men. Aristocratic fathers would give their daughter to friends and enemies in order to profit in some social, financial, or political manner.[81] Consequently, both women and slaves to various degrees were understood as property that increased the value of a man's estate. In *Sociable Letters* Cavendish argues that "Daughters are to be accounted but as Moveable Goods or Furnitures that wear out."[82] Both women and slaves were also not allowed the full legal rights as free men. As Travellia, a female slave, argues that "it is an injustice to take the goods from the right owners without

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[78] For a more in depth and interesting discussion of women's legal status in regards to property and the ways they maneuvered around patriarchal legislature, see Stretton 40-57.

[79] See Mary Carleton, "Mary Carleton, from *The Case of Madam Mary Carleton*," *Women's Writing of The Early Modern Period, 1588-1688: An Anthology*, ed. Stephanie Hodgson-Wright (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002) 223.

[80] Stretton argues that although early modern law regarding female property rights was extreme, many women went about their daily lives as if this concept did not exist. Stretton 44.

[81] See Robin L. Bott, "'O, Keep Me From Their Worse Than Killing Lust': Ideologies of Rape and Mutilation in Chaucer's *Physician's Tale* and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*," *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, eds. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 189-212.

[82] Margaret Cavendish, *CCXI Sociable Letters* (London, 1664) 184.

their consent," she fervently articulates the republican ideal that an individual should have the right not only to her own body, but to her property. The text thus highlights women's enslaved status within revolutionary theorists' own discourse of liberty (*APC* 52). Since women fit within republican definitions of slavery, how could women be considered anything else for women "are kept like birds in cages" (*TPPO* sig. 1v).

Though Cavendish's strategy of linking women's nonsubject status with slavery was unusual for her time, women authors later in the century explored the connection. Mary Astell situates women's inferior status within the framework of republican beliefs of equality.

> If all Men are born Free, how is it that all Women are born Slaves? As they must be, if the being subjected to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary Will of Men' be the perfect Condition of Slavery. And, if the Essence of Freedom consists, as our Masters say it does, in having a standing Rule to live by? And why is Slavery so much condemn'd and strove against in one Case, and so highly applauded, and held so necessary and so sacred in another[83]

Using the powerfully charged rhetoric of slavery, Astell reveals the contradiction in republican ideology. As men gained more rights within society, women were placed outside the logical parameters for men's equality and freedom. Gillespie discusses how male domination, particularly in regards to the marriage contract, was preserved by republican contract theorists since women were rendered incapable of either forming or breaking contracts.[84] For example, Parker argues that a "wife is inferiour in nature, and was created for the assistance of man…but it is otherwise in the State

[83] Mary Astell, "From *Some Reflections Upon Marriage*," *First Feminists: British Women Writers, 1578-1799*, ed. Moira Ferguson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 193.
[84] Gillespie 154.

betwixt man and man."[85] The foundation for their inferior status within the development of the revolutionary rights was founded on biology; that women were more irrational and must be governed by men's reason.[86] Thus, contract-based society and republicanism was initially just as destructive and oppressive (if not more) for women as patriarchal monarchy.

X. Identity and Early Modern Rape Legislature

As Cavendish explores female status, it is not surprising that this is done within a story about rape, particularly since early modern perceptions of rape were important in the development of female subjectivity. Both rape legislature and understandings of the female self were issues that were both intrinsically connected and were also changing. In order to understand the development of early modern rape laws and its connection to female identity, it is necessary to trace the meaning of rape in previous eras.

Many historians have interpreted the ambiguous language of medieval rape legislature as meaning that even if an individual woman agrees to a sexual act, it was still rape without parental authorization; effectively suppressing a women's abilities to exercise their individual powers of consent.[87] Not only were women not legally able to consent, rape was understood as theft of property by one man from another.

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[85] Henry Parker, *Observations upon some of his Majesties late Answers and Expresses*, (1642) 185, cited in Kahn 532.
[86] Gillespie 154.
[87] The specific law which Greenstadt addresses is called the Second Statute of Westminster (1285) and a full citation of this law can be found in Amy Greenstadt, "'Rapt from Himself': Rape and the Poetics of Corporeality in Sidney's *Old Arcadia*,' *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, eds. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 314.

Any crime against the female body was a crime against the male estate since the ravished woman was essentially damaged goods.[88] Robin L. Bott argues that by "placing a price tag on a woman's womb, rape law reflected and contributed to social views of women as property."[89] Women were also often abducted and sexually assaulted to force unwanted marriages. The rapists would then be allowed to take full possession of the woman's land and inheritance and after wedlock occurred, the marriage redeemed the offender from any punishment.[90] Before 1576, the only penalty incurred by a rape conviction was imprisonment for a year or less.[91] In 1597 a significant law was passed which entirely altered the definition and legal status of rape.[92] Marion Wynne-Davies claims that this law not only provides more severe punishment for the crime, execution, it also effectively defines rape as being a crime against the woman herself, opposed to that of a theft against her family. Since this act, a woman's body was understood as being legally her own possession and not that of her nearest male relative.[93]

It is significant that Cavendish uses a story of rape to explore women's subjectivity since the 1597 change in rape legislature contributed to women being legally understood as individuals and during this period, in all other areas of law,

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[88] Bott 191.
[89] Ibid. 192.
[90] In 1486 Henry VII passed an act that removed this matrimonial protection and allowed the families to reclaim its possessions. However, the criminal went unpunished through what was called a benefit of clergy which meant that a man who could claim particular clerical skills had the right to be tried by an ecclesiastical rather than a civil court. This became open to vast abuse, particularly by the nobility. Marion Wynne-Davies, "'The Swallowing Womb': Consumed and Consuming Women in *Titus Andronicus*," *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Valerie Wayne (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) 129-152.
[91] Ibid. 131.
[92] A full citation of this law can be found in Wynne-Davies 130,131.
[93] Ibid. 130, 131.

women did not gain greater status as 'persons'.[94] In early modern legislature, husband and wife were one person, sharing one legal personality. Yet, that personality was the husband's and the woman's legal identity was overshadowed or covered by her spouse. Since she technically lacked an independent legal personality, a married woman in theory could not enter contracts, sue, write a will or own property.[95] Stretton argues that a "feature of this era was the frequency with which lawyers, judges and civic or religious leaders interpreted ostensibly universal terms, such as 'householders', 'property owners' or 'the people', as applying only to men."[96] Though Sara Mendelson argues that many women did have vocational identities, officially they were routinely classified by marital status - as maid, wife or widow, rather than occupation. Mendelson demonstrates that in reality middle and lower class women performed a remarkable range of paid and unpaid work from manual labor, crafts, service, teaching, running businesses, to prostitution and theft.[97] Even aristocratic women managed large estates, supervising and organizing servants and children. Aristocratic housewifery required not only financial and managerial skills, but also knowledge of chemistry, mathematics, philosophy and anatomy.[98] Though women vastly contributed to the running of society, women were not 'persons' in legislature. Even in religion, man and wife were understood as one

[94] Greenstadt 313.
[95] Stretton 42.
[96] Ibid. 42.
[97] Sara Mendelson, "Woman and Work," *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. Anita Pacheco (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002) 58-76. Mendelson also points out that similar to contemporary society, women were not paid as much as men for the same work.
[98] Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

person.[99] Thus, regardless of their status or vocations, early modern culture did not provide women an absolute, individual identity.

Although women were still not subjects or citizens, the 1597 act began to identify them as individuals beyond the status of property. Yet, across a whole range of discourses, women still "heard that their bodies were not theirs to command."[100] It is thus significant that Miseria, who is owned by no man, argues that her body and chastity are her own; "for why should you rob me of that which Nature freely gave?" (*APC* 52). She never argues that the rape would wrong her family. She further argues that the consent would have to be from her own person rather than from parental figures. This is particularly significant since a rape conviction was much more likely to occur if the crime was against a virgin since the family experienced serious financial loss from such an experience.[101] Cavendish demonstrates an awareness that the female body can become a significant epistemological site of political resistance as Miseria argues that her chastity is not possessed by any other, but her own self.

Later in the century, Mary Astell demonstrates the realistic problems of a society that defined women as male property. She asks

> to whom are we poor Fatherless Maids, and Widows who have lost their Masters, owe Subjection? It can't be to all Men in general, unless all Men were agreed to give the same Commands; Do we then fall as Strays, to the first who find us?[102]

Not all women have fatherly authority or protection. If women are defined by being male property, what is a woman that is not under male authority? Gowing argues

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[99] Stretton 42.
[100] Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 53.
[101] Greenstadt 345.

that women who belonged to no man "could only too readily be construed as open to *all* men."[103] Even not having friends could leave a woman vulnerable to assault.[104] This problem is also presented in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*. When the protagonist has lost her family she is vulnerable, enslaved and nearly sexually assaulted without patriarchal authority and protection. In some respects, the text reflects the predicament that many lower class women faced; there is evidence that some people assumed that a master had the right of sexual access to the bodies of their female household servants and there was little, if any, context in which a servant could complain of rape.[105] Gowing argues that "the body of the single woman (and especially the single woman in service) was barely her own. To maintain the boundaries of chastity against the intrusive touch of masters, their sons and their friends could be a constant battle."[106] Though Miseria is not a household servant, she is even lower, a slave, and the entire story is about her attempts to argue for and maintain the right to her own body. Yet, she successfully learns to protect herself through cross dressing and assuming masculine roles. Significantly, it is only through transgressing outside the parameters of femininity into male, public roles that she is able to defend herself.

As the protagonist learns to appropriate male personas, she gives herself various names that represent her situation, Miseria, Travellia and Affectionata.

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[102] Astell 195.
[103] Gowing 60.
[104] For example, a fourteen year old servant named Margery Evans accused a gentleman, famed for his wickedness, of raping her. Disturbingly, the victim was initially thrown into prison for her accusation. Though she was examined by three women, including a midwife, who confirmed that she had been raped, because the young girl was poor and friendless, it was deemed impossible to determine the truth; "the friendlessness of Margery Evans was in itself reason to disbelieve her" (Gowing 91).
[105] Ibid. 63. This was even more problematic since non-aristocratic single women could legally be forced to become servants against their will. Ibid. 59. For a fascinating discussion of single, servant women's status see Gowing's chapter "The politics of touch" 52-81.

Without a patriarchal head, she is able to name and thus define her identity. Her external actions and experiences define her sense of self, rather than biological sex or male lineage. As Miseria cross dresses, easily shifting into male personas, she demonstrates that male occupations, roles and identity are not derived from a naturalized biological origin, but are culturally constructed. Judith Butler argues that cross dressing denaturalizes sex binaries, revealing the performative aspects of gender, rather than a 'true' core identity that is founded upon biological sex. If gender identity was fixed and induced by nature, than Miseria would not have been able to successfully assume masculine personas and convincingly perform male roles, mirroring Butler's argument that a drag performance indicates that

> there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character.[107]

Drag creates a distinction between the biological sex of the individual and the performance they play, demonstrating that gender is derived not from an innate, gendered self, but is part of a sustained, everyday performance.[108]

Miseria's ability to perform a plethora of male roles also indicates that gender is an unstable category. Butler argues that "in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself-as well as its contingency."[109] Yet, it is not only contemporary theory which has perceived subversive elements in drag

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[106] Ibid. 73.

[107] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 141.

[108] And those who do not perform their gender properly, such as 'effeminate men' and 'butch women' are socially castigated. Ibid. 141.

performances; in early modern society, female cross-dressing provoked so much anxiety that it was illegal. A woman who successfully cross-dressed, passing as male, could be prosecuted for fraud[110]. Anxiety regarding gender disorder was particularly apparent from 1580 onward, when women wearing masculine attire were regularly castigated by pamphlets and from pulpits.[111] Apprehension over women wearing men's clothing was to some extent derived from shifts in style since the late sixteenth-century when women began to increasingly adopt features of male dress. During the civil war, many women even chose men's clothing for security and ease.[112] However, though sumptuary legislature had been curbed by 1604, Charles I still issued a proclamation in 1643 stating "Let no Woman presume to Counterfeit her sex by wearing man's apparell," demonstrating the social anxiety that the female cross-dresser provoked.[113] Rachel Trubowitz argues that women who wore men's attire were understood as unnatural. In the mother/whore dichotomy, cross-dressers fit into the whore side of the binary.[114] Through this binary, other transgressors such as 'unnatural' foreigners and prostitutes were also linked to the 'unnatural' cross-dressed woman, leaving a commonplace association of female cross-dressing with immodesty. It was believed that through their blurring of gender boundaries, sexual

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[109] Ibid. 137.
[110] Valerie Traub, "Desire and the Differences it Makes," *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Valerie Wayne (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) 98.
[111] Though men could be prosecuted for sodomy for the same act. Ibid. 98.
[112] Ribeiro 84.
[113] Ibid. 84. Earlier King James complained against "the insolency of our women, and their wearing of broad-brimmed hats, pointed doubltets their hair cut short or shorn, and some of them stilettos or poniards" (Angeline Goreau, *The Whole Duty of a Woman: Female Writers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1985) 91, qtd. in Rachel Trubowitz, "Cross-Dressed Women and Natural Mothers: "Boundary Panic" in *Hic Mulier*," *Debating Gender in Early Modern England, 1500-1700*, eds. Cristina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuki (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) 185).
[114] Trubowitz 187.

license was advertised.[115] It is consequently ironic that Cavendish creates a foreign, cross-dressed heroine who nearly becomes a prostitute to voice a fervent defense for female chastity. In defending the literal definition of chastity and limiting it to a biological act, Cavendish severs the ideology associated with it as Miseria exclaims to her army

> no habit is to be denied; for it is not the outward garments that can corrupt the honest mind, for modesty may clothe the soul of a naked body, and a sword becomes a woman when it is used against the enemies of her honour; for though her strength be weak, yet she ought to show her will; and to die in the defence of honour, is to live with noble fame; therefore neither camp, nor court, nor city, nor country, nor danger, nor habit, nor any worldly felicity, must separate the love of chastity, and our sex (*APC* 115)

Though the early modern concept of chastity, which was associated with modesty and privacy, served as a means to maintain women within the private, domestic sphere, Miseria redefines chastity outside of the parameters of acceptable female behavior. Though women were supposed to be silent, obedient and chaste, female chastity is reinterpreted in such a way that it transforms into a subversive medium to challenge the ideals of silence, privacy and obedience. As she transcends the female realm to enter the public, male world to defend her modesty, chastity is redefined, allowing other behavior that would be considered masculine, public or immodest for women.[116]

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[115] Ibid. 185.

[116] It is also interesting that Cavendish provides the conventional attitude towards women who wear men's clothing in *The Lady Incognito* in *Nature's Pictures*. Unlike, Miseria who was attempting to remain chaste, a women traveling incognito may actually be attempting to visit a lover where "they may chance to cuckold their Husbands Incognito" (*NP* 398). Both *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* and *The Lady Incognito* are within *Nature's Pictures*, demonstrating Cavendish's interest in portraying various opinions and perspectives upon one subject.

XI. Cross-dressing and the Performance of Gender Roles

Assaulted and Pursued Chastity not only explores women's selfhood in context of the new female rape legislature, but also through multiple male personas. Later in the century Sarah Fyge Field Egerton perceives a relation between female roles and slavery.

> From the first dawn of Life, unto the Grave,
> Poor Womankind's in every State, a Slave.
> The Nurse, the Mistress, Parent and the Swain,
> For Love she must, there's none escape that Pain;
> Then comes the last, the fatal Slavery,
> The Husband with insulting Tyranny
> Can have ill Manners justify'd by Law[117]

The husband's authority is the most insulting since marital abuse was justified through legislature. The Lawes Resolution of 1632 stated that a man might beat an outlaw, a traitor, a Pagan, his slave, or his wife.[118] A wife is legally placed within the same measure as criminals, traitors, heretics and slaves. Though cloaked with the ideology of love and affection, Egerton argues that all of women's roles are actually various manifestations of slavery. Cavendish also understood not only female status, but women's roles as part of their enslaved condition. Perhaps this is why Miseria must transgress out of conventional female roles and claim ownership over her own body in order to name herself and find her identity. *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* becomes more than a fantasy story, but an exploration of female selfhood. It is only through shedding her female status and becoming 'male' that Miseria is able to successfully obtain absolute control over her person. In contrast to royalist

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[117] Sarah Fyge Field Egerton, "The Emulation," *First Feminists: British Women Writers, 1578-1799*, ed. Moira Ferguson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 169.
[118] Gillespie 172, 173.

thought which depended on the belief in idealized, patriarchal and orderly relations, it is only when she subverts and disrupts the established patriarchy and hierarchical system that she is able to define herself actively and assume subject positions.

As the protagonist names and defines her self, she contradicts early modern conceptions of women which understood them in terms of the male relatives who had authority over them. However, critics have argued that Cavendish often derives her sense of self from male relations. Graham, Hinds, Hobby and Wilcox argue that in her autobiography, Cavendish "found it impossible to create an image of herself without reference to those masculine forces which, by contradiction, defined her" and that she can only define her individuality "by reference to her father and husband."[119] Mirroring this interpretation, Williams also argues that Cavendish understands her historic existence within a patriarchal chronology since the text begins with the opening words "my father was a Gentleman" and ends the story with her relationship to her husband. However, the introduction to her autobiography is actually located at the conclusion of the previous story where she provides her reasons for writing an autobiography. It is not her family, but for "the sake of after-Ages," demonstrating a preoccupation with individual fame and immortality, rather than patriarchal lineage (*NP* 367). This strong desire for immortality through fame is also present at the conclusion. Though it is true that she mentions her husband, it is in context of her concern that a married woman can lose her identity. She claims that one of the primary reasons for writing her autobiography is because otherwise "after-Ages should mistake" her identity; "for my Lord having had two Wives, I might easily

[119] Elspeth Graham, Hilary Hinds, Elaine Hobby and Helen Wilcox, eds., *Her Own Life: Autobiographical writings by seventeenth-century Englishwomen* (London: Routledge, 2002) 89, 25.

have been mistaken, especially if I should dye, and my Lord Marry again" (*NP* 391). The ending demonstrates a conscious awareness that a woman can become 'deleted' in a patrilineal and patriarchal system. Though early modern women gained status and authority through matrimony,[120] if a woman is in legal and religious terms only defined by her husband, than "her Name is Lost," particularly in "her Marrying, for she quits her Own, and is Named as her Husband."[121] If a husband remarries after his wife's death, than, an identity that is based on him would problematically be deleted. Cavendish argues that she will lose her identity and fame if she does not write. This problem is not limited to married women since apprehension over female identity is represented in both *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* and *The Contract*. Both protagonists are without a natural father or husband. As a consequence Miseria initially has no name or identity without male authority. Though the protagonist of *The Contract* has a name, it is a significant metaphor for her condition. Her name is Deletia, an appropriate title since her identity is in effect deleted with the absence of a father or husband.

XII. Early Modern Homoeroticism

Since the text transgresses and redefines female identity in multiple ways, it would seem appropriate to relate the issues of identity and gender to the homoeroticism in the text. Yet, Valeria Traub warns of the problems with anachronistic literary interpretations of early modern homosexuality since deviations

[120] Gowing 55-59.
[121] Cavendish 183.

in gender roles did not automatically implicate women as being 'unnatural' in their sexuality.[122] Unlike contemporary society, homosexuality was also not a primary identification for the self, nor did it have the same associations with gender roles. Modern literary analysis often conflates gender roles with sexuality, linking both to a kind of biological inheritance. It is assumed that men desire other men because they have assumed a feminized passive position and lesbians desire women in imitation of 'active' masculine desire. Traub argues that as a consequence all sexuality "engages in a structurally heterosexual mode of operation based on the duality of passivity and activity: whatever your biological sex, if you identify as/with a man, then you will desire a woman, and vice versa."[123] However, early modern culture had very different understandings of homosexuality. Deviations in eroticism were not necessarily coded as violations of gender. For example, though there was a plethora of cases involving heterosexual female sexual transgressions, such as premarital sex, adultery and bastardy, there seemed to be a general lack of concern regarding lesbianism since it was hardly recognized in legislature and women were never summoned before courts for accusations of homosexual activity.[124] Though legislature against male homosexual acts was extreme, it was rarely prosecuted and only if other criminal or political transgressions accompanied the act.[125] Traub suggests that homoeroticism was unremarkable as long as it did not threaten the open lineage family.[126] For example, widows were often advised by many physicians such as Nicholas Fontaine to call in a "skillful midwife" to use a "convenient oyntment,"

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[122] Traub 98.
[123] Ibid. 89.
[124] Ibid. 97.
[125] Ibid. 95.
[126] Ibid. 97.

that might furnish "pleasing conflicts" and relieve the widow's sexual tension.[127] Though this would seem inappropriately sexual in contemporary medical practice, it is recommended in Fontaine's medical guidebook, demonstrating that female/female eroticism did not signify or generate the same meanings as it would today.[128] This is apparent in the Queen's intense unrequited desire for Travellia; "grant me my Delight,/ Give me my lover, or destroy me quite" (*APC* 103). Although in the end it is apparent that she cannot wed her lover, the desire itself is not condemned in the text. It is the vast gulf between their class statuses which is the predicament. Travellia claims "if your people knew, or did suspect your love to me, they would rebel and turn unto your enemy" (*APC* 91). The desire creates tension and fears, but it is not because lesbian desire is being portrayed as unnatural, it is because Travellia is "a creature mean and poor, not worthy such a queen as you, and 'twere not wise to hazard all for me" (*APC* 91). The queen could lose her kingdom if her 'unnatural' desire for a slave on the other side of the class spectrum was discovered. Furthermore, the "revelation of the beloved's sex does not alter the nature of her desire" nor is it "presented as beyond the pale"; the Queen was "angry that she was deceived, yet still did love, as wishing she had been a man" (*APC* 112).[129] Though heterosexual, patriarchal order is reestablished at the end, the homoerotic desire itself is not demonized or portrayed as unnatural.

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[127] Nicholas Fontaine (1652), qtd. in Lynette McGrath, *Subjectivity and Women's Poetry in Early Modern England: 'Why on the Ridge Should She Desire to Go?'* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2002) 45.

[128] Traub elsewhere argues that many dramatic texts from the Renaissance "encourage us to recognize how utterly conventional, even routine, was the eroticization of female friendship." Yet, the female friend's desire is ultimately untenable because "it fails to contribute to the reproduction of patriarchal authority, including the social structures of the early modern household and the transmission of property and wealth" (Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 181).

[129] Ibid. 293.

Early modern representations of homoerotic desire demonstrate the flexibility of erotic attraction without one mode of desire based upon gendered binary logic.[130] Traub argues that as "it traverses 'masculine' and 'feminine' sites, this desire challenges the binary language of identity that upholds the modern erotic economy."[131] Though masculine desire initially appears aggressive and active as the Prince pursues Miseria and, in a parallel plot structure, the King pursues the Queen, it is paradoxically passive:

> For our Master is her Captive, and her Thrall,
> Both to command him, and his Kingdom all (*APC* 105).

The King even defines himself as enslaved as he declares in a gesture of passivity to the Queen "lead me as your slave" (*APC* 106). Furthermore, it is not until after Miseria defeats and ultimately masters the Prince in battle, that she accepts him. Though the Prince's desire remains heterosexual, it is not predicated upon a dominating male sexuality. He desire's the protagonist, regardless of the identity she assumes, the role she plays, or whether she is his slave or master.

Petrarchan love is also turned upside down as the Queen places herself in the 'masculine' position of courtly love, where her homoerotic desire for the enslaved and disguised protagonist, ironically enslaves her.[132] As the Queen assumes the masculine position of the Petrarchan lover, she demonstrates that the courtly mode of love is not restricted to men as she despairs at her unrequited love;

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[130] Traub, "Desire and the Differences it Makes," 99, 100.
[131] Ibid. 101.
[132] For a very innovative discussion of Cavendish's strategy of redefining Petrarchan love see Theodora A. Jankowski, "'Good Enough to Eat': The Domestic Economy of Woman-Woman Eroticism in Margaret Cavendish and Andrew Marvell," *Privacy, Domesticity, and Women in Early Modern England*, ed. Corinne S. Abate (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003) 83-110. Jankowski argues that Cavendish's blazon, which is also a food recipe, radically alters the traditional Petrarchan relationship between the speaker and the desired female into a more egalitarian context.

And I am only bound to Slavery;
First to my passions, then to his Tyranny:
What shall I do, you Gods above?
You punish me, and yet you make me love (*APC* 102)

Her desire also does not alter with the power and status of her lover. Power, gender, and desire are confused as both male and females are enslaved by their passions, demonstrating a flexibility of erotic attraction that is not fixed upon gendered active/passive dichotomies.

XIII. Popular Sovereignty

Throughout the text, class, gender and sexuality are not fixed, innate or naturalized structures that define an individual. They are performances which are always subject to change and chance. Though Cavendish threatens the ideological structure of absolute politics, order is eventually restored at the end. The two marriages reinstate a harmonious monarchy and the sense of subversion is dissipated. However, this union and harmony is only created when rulers gain full consent. Both the Prince and King attempt to force a contract with their lovers and it is not until they negotiate and peacefully gain full affectionate consent without coercion that a contract is established. Though a contemporary audience may be disturbed by an ending where women happily marry their violent stalkers and would-be rapists, the depiction of rape redefines the relations between sovereign and subject, and husband and wife. As previously mentioned, women were legally given the right to consent, but female consent was still problematic at large, particularly since early modern

culture "equated men's love and desire with coercion and violence."[133] Cavendish rejects a definition of male desire that is violent and forceful as men only obtain love and marriage when they peacefully gain consent, without violence or force. Both *Assaulted and Pursed Chastity* and *The Contract* demonstrate the principle that only contracts, whether marital or political, that are established without coercion and force are valid. Both texts also depict nobility as deriving from individual actions rather than from titles and descent. When Travellia is initially granted the kingdom in the queen's absence, the people

> fell a-murmuring, not only in that she left a stranger, but a poor slave, who was taken prisoner and sold, and a person who was of no higher birth, than a shipmaster's son, that he should govern the kingdom, and rule the people; whereupon they began to design his death, which was thought best to be put in execution when she was gone.
>
> But he behaved himself with such an affable demeanour, accompanied with such smooth, civil and pleasing words, expressing the sweetness of his nature by his actions of clemency, distributing justice with such even weights, ordering everything with that prudence, governing with that wisdom, as begot such love in every heart, that their mouths ran over with praises, ringing out the sound with the clappers of their tongues into every ear, and by their obedience showed their duty and zeal to all his commands, or rather to his persuasions; so gently did he govern (*APC* 92)

Against all odds, she ultimately gains her position due to the people's opinion rather than by hereditary rights demonstrating Cavendish's reoccurring interest in popular sovereignty. A notion of popular sovereignty developed in England sometime between 1644 and 1647 which "no longer equated the people with their elected representatives in Parliament, but with the populace of the country."[134] *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* expresses a concern with the opinion of the population itself as Travellia radically gains the affections from the masses "freely from [their] souls"

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[133] Gowing 99.

[134] Although this perception of the people did not include servants, vagrants or women. See Smith 97.

and not by their representatives, force or divine intervention (*APC* 116). She also 'gently' governs depicting that force cannot be used for rulership. After successfully leading an army "all the soldiers, as if they had been one voice, cried out, Travellia shall be Viceregency; which was granted to pacify them," portraying another instance where power derives not from the heavens above or from a fixed, naturalized order, but from the consent and opinion of the actual people (*APC* 116). The parallel plot structure of the Prince depicts similar themes of effective rulership deriving from merit and popular sovereignty.

> [he] ended the strife amongst them, and begot from them such love and respect, that they made him their arbitrator, and divider of the spoils; which he performed with that justice and discretion to each one, that they made him their governor and chief ruler over them; which power he used with that clemency and wisdom, that he was esteemed rather as their god than their captain, giving him all ceremonious obedience (*APC* 78).

Similar to arguments made in *The Contract*, nobility is defined through individual leadership skills and abilities rather than hierarchical lineage.

Although the Prince gains full confidence and consent from the pirates, he does not initially gain consent from the protagonist. His attempts to gain absolute rule of her body by force causes rebellion, violence and chaos to the social order as Travellia transgresses gender and class boundaries to avoid his attacks. The prince can only be successful in his endeavors once a contract of consent is established without coercion of any kind. This depicts the nature of power as deriving not from a fixed order, but from the population. Similar definitions of power were voiced by parliamentarians such as Parker who argues that power derives from the people and consequently, "the authority and power of the people which creates the prince and princely power and augments or limits it as there is cause…[is] greater than the

prince or royal power."[135] Power does not disseminate above from God, but is only created from the active opinions of the populace.

Since power ultimately derives from the popular consent of the people, Cavendish contradicts absolutists who believed that power is ordained by God alone. Though monarchs were often deified by absolutists,[136] Miseria remarkably becomes a God herself through the people's opinion. The population are so overwhelmed and impressed with her speech that they "ador[ed] him as a god, and would have built altars, and offered sacrifices unto him, but he forbade them" (*APC* 75). Yet, she gains this status not only through popular opinion, but her own individual merit as well. Though she was initially to be a human sacrifice, she uses her own ingenuity, learns their language and appropriates technology in order to convince the population that she is of divine status and should not be sacrificed.

> *the great sun, saith he, will destroy you with one of his small thunderbolts, killing first your priests and then the rest.* With that shot off his pistol into the breast of the chief priest, wherewith he straight fell down dead; the noise of the pistol, and the flash of the fire, which they never saw before, and the effect of it upon the priest, struck them with such a horror, and did so terrify them, as they all kneeled down imploring mercy, and forgiveness (*APC* 71).

In a manner that mirrors the representation of religion in *The Blazing World*, power is justified and maintained with not only leadership skills, but with scientific illusions that appear as religious miracles. However sex does not interfere with her ability to appear as God. As Miseria becomes God on earth, she demonstrates that the female self is also divine. It is not only divinity which is unaffected by biological sex, but gender does not interfere with popular opinion. After successfully role-playing diverse male roles, Travellia divulges her true identity to the population. Yet, her sex

[135] Parker "Observations upon some of his majesties late answers and expresses" 134.

does not interfere with their opinion of her. The people exclaim "Heaven bless you, of what sex soever you be," paralleling her views upon class; that merit alone should define an individual (*APC* 115).

As Cavendish complicates and redefines understandings of power, she exerts the importance of personal merit over privilege and ongoing political consent which would be incongruous with staunch royalist thinking. Though critics have generally only heard the conservative voices in Cavendish's work, placing her work within seventeenth-century political thought demonstrates that there is much more to Cavendish than an inconsistent royalist woman. Many of her voices explore some of the most radical, subversive ideas of early modern politics. However, diversity of voices also parallels her understanding of self that is multifarious and unstable. An identity that embodies plurality would never hold the same opinion, just as a natural world based on the principle of change, will never be static or fixed. Like nature, the self is subject to continuous change, fortune and chance. Yet identity is also defined by personal skills and merit rather than class, sex or static hierarchical relations. Since every individual is derived from a changeable, contingent selfhood, a monarch is both superior and inferior to his or her subjects. The self becomes a radical locus of potential agency that collapses categories and binaries, allowing every person to potentially be monarch, slave, man, woman and even God.

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[136] See Smith 104, 105.

Conclusion

I. The Critical Field

Though Cavendish's philosophy is unique, it was far from being isolated from the intellectual climate of her time. As her science intricately critiques epistemological and political traditions, it redefines the tenets that shaped reality and truth for early modern culture; a society which developed the scientific and political foundations of our own contemporary society. Cavendish's theory of nature, as mentioned in earlier chapters, is particularly relevant to the contemporary feminist project of deconstructing the scientific claim of objectivity in relation to gender and power. Yet, feminism is only one facet which makes Cavendish more comprehensible and appealing to contemporary scholarship. Changes have occurred in the critical field which have altered how a piece is accessed, providing a more conducive framework for understanding the significance of Cavendish's philosophy. For example, the concept from new historicism that a text actively engages in politics and is part of the process of history, rather than an object outside of common culture or a static mirror that only reflects politics, makes Cavendish much more comprehensible since her texts actively redefine, play and subvert the politics intrinsic within early modern epistemologies. Emma Rees argues that "her work was politically charged, not in any immediately evident way, but in a highly complex and

imaginative way."[1] Though scholars previously dismissed Cavendish's contradictions as madness or indications of inept thinking, the postmodern emphasis on paradox, fragmentation and resistance to categorization, along with the suggestion that reason could be oppression, bears striking similarities to Cavendish's theoretical agenda. Jennifer Low has also noticed parallels between postmodernism and Cavendish's texts as she claims that "one might believe that Cavendish had anticipated postmodern notions of the self."[2] As postmoderism deconstructs the very epistemological values of the Age of Reason, Cavendish was arguably providing a similar type of critique when it was forming as she de-centers and disorders traditional values, classical logic and genre. Her strategic destabilizing of dramatic genre has particularly affected receptions of her plays. For example, Williamson was exasperated that Cavendish "felt entirely free to create totally unstageable plays" which "flouted the most conventional and communal of genres."[3] Yet, recently Sara Mendelson notes that critics have focused their censures on the form of Cavendish's drama rather than the substantive content, arguing that critics did not appreciate that "generic rule-breaking was not limited to her plays, but was a feature of her entire literary oeuvre."[4] Though some scholars have been previously frustrated with Cavendish's refusal to commit to the rules of literary genre, there has been a critical shift. What was considered a failure is now often being celebrated as a complex challenge to the rules that shape genre. Emma Rees argues that "Genre and hierarchy

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[1] Emma L. E. Rees, *Margaret Cavendish, Gender, Genre, Exile* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) 5.
[2] Jennifer Low, "Surface and Interiority: Self-Creation in Margaret Cavendish's *The Claspe*," *Philological Quarterly* 77.2 (1998): 162.
[3] Marilyn Williamson, *Raising Their Voices: British Women Writers, 1650-1750* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990) 54.

were inextricably linked" and Cavendish manipulated genre for political purposes while Alexandra Bennett argues that generic flexibility "gives Cavendish the room or potential to imagine change in the world."[5] Some critics have recently been arguing that though her plays were written during the Interregnum, when theater was banned, they were indeed intended for the stage. Gweno Williams claims that the 1995 production of *The Convent of Pleasure*, by university students, provided exciting and unexpected dramatic potential and Judith Peacock explains that it was the extremely subversive content of Cavendish's plays, rather than their 'untheatrical nature', that later obstructed their performance.[6] Like Peacock, Irene Dash also discusses the radical nature of *The Convent of Pleasure* stating that her students, in contemporary times, were shocked by their content and had difficulties being open-minded to the lesbian politics presented.[7] If young university students are now having troubles being broad minded enough for Cavendish's thought, we can only imagine the challenges she created for previous centuries.

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[4] Sara Mendelson, "Playing Games with Gender and Genre: the Dramatic Self-Fashioning of Margaret Cavendish," *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish*, eds. Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003) 198.

[5] See Rees 8 and Alexandra Bennett, "Fantastic Realism: Margaret Cavendish and the Possibilities of Drama," *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish*, eds. Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003) 183.

[6] See Alison Findlay, Gweno Williams and Stephanie J. Hodgson-Wright, "'The Play is ready to be Acted': women and dramatic production, 1570-1670," *Women's Writing* 6.1 (1999): 129-148 and Judith Peacock, "Writing for the Brain and Writing for the Boards: the Producibility of Margaret Cavendish's Dramatic Texts," *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish*, ed. Stephen Clucas (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2003) 104.

[7] Irene G Dash, "Single-Sex Retreats in Two Early Modern Dramas: *Love's Labor's Lost* and *The Convent of Pleasure*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47.4 (1996): 389.

II. Scientific Developments

Though the critical field has created a more conducive theoretical atmosphere for understanding Cavendish, other aspects of contemporary culture are also significant in the reception of her work. Society is demonstrating an increasing interest and acceptance of science fiction not only in popular culture, but academia as well. For example, many universities are now offering science fiction literature courses and The University of Liverpool even has a science fiction postgraduate MA course.[8] Though the status of science fiction is increasing, Cavendish's scientific position itself is much more acceptable and understandable in contemporary times. Critiquing the foundations of classical science may have once seemed absurd and pointless since mechanical science seemed to have discovered laws that were clear, unalterable and deterministic. However, the rules of classical science break apart at the subatomic, quantum level. In his introduction to quantum theory, John Polkinghorne claims that "the grand edifice of classical physics was not just beginning to crack. It looked as though an earthquake had struck it."[9] Though theorizing from a seventeenth-century perspective, Cavendish's scientific world view has some surprising parallels with the contemporary quantum world. Like Cavendish, paradox and science are not incompatible or opposing principles. Indeed an individual who is interested in learning quantum theory will be "prepared for the paradoxical."[10]

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[8] See English Literature Department website, University of Liverpool, 23 November 2004, http://www.liv.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/taught_courses/science_fiction_studies_ma.htm.

[9] John Polkinghorne, *Quantum Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 11.

[10] J. C. Polkinghorne, *The Quantum World*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987) 1.

In order to demonstrate the curious similarities between Cavendish and quantum physics, it will be necessary to explain some of the basic tenets of quantum theory. Though classical physics provided clear laws to determine the effects of material objects, in the quantum world, subatomic particles can be a multitude of probable states until measurement or observation.[11] Not only does this indicate that location and momentum can paradoxically exist simultaneously in several states, but observation or measurement from the individual seems to affect physical reality. Kenneth Ford explains this "does *not* mean that an electron may have one momentum or another momentum and we just don't know which it has. It means that the electron literally has *all* the momenta at once. If you can't visualize this, don't worry. Neither can the quantum physicist."[12] Tony Hey and Patrick Walters also argue that

> Unlike classical objects, we have seen that a quantum system can exist in a superposition of several quantum states. It is the process of measurement that is somehow supposed to cause the quantum superposition to collapse down to one definite *classical* state [. . .] Only after measurement can we talk about the quantum system as having some definite properties.[13]

Though this is strange and paradoxical, it is a fundamental principle in quantum theory. Furthermore, there is "no universal consensus amongst physicists about the

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[11] In order to explain how this is so it will be necessary to explain a monumental experiment within the field. To understand if electrons were waves or particles, scientists, using an electron gun, created two slits for a ray of electrons to pass through. If they passed through both slits this would indicate that they were waves, yet if they passed through one, they were a particle. This could be detected by a monitor screen which depicted the location of where the electrons eventually landed. From the resulting locations, scientists discovered that the electrons produced a strange result; they were both waves and particles. Quite distressed by this dilemma, scientists then placed a device by the slits to observe what exactly was happening. The result was even more shocking - once observed, the electron became either a distinct wave or particle, landing in very different locations than previously on the end monitor screen. This surreal result suggests that observation or measurement from the individual, affects physical reality. See Tony Hey and Patrick Walters, *The New Quantum Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 7-15.

[12] Kenneth W. Ford, *The Quantum World: Quantum Physics for Everyone* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004) 228.

[13] Hey and Walters 173.

mechanism by which 'measurement' causes [an] electron to jump into one particular state."[14] This, perhaps disturbingly, contradicts all of our physical experiences of daily life and reality. For example, John Ford explains if "your head were an electron, it would be spinning simultaneously in two opposite directions, along any axis you wish to choose."[15]

III. Cavendish and Quantum Physics

Though it could be argued the subatomic world is just simply different from the macroscopic world, the atomic bomb and laser technology, demonstrate how subatomic behavior powerfully affects our reality. Disturbed by the implications of quantum theory, Erwin Schrödinger demonstrated how even its paradoxes could apply to the macroscopic world. He theorized that if he placed a cat in a box, which was attached to a mechanism that allowed a fifty percent chance of a quantum process to trigger poisonous gas into the box, quantum paradoxes would extend to the cat. According to the principles of quantum theory, the cat would be both dead and alive at the same time, until observation or measurement decided if the poisonous gas was released or not.[16] This leads to further questions, which observation could affect the outcome, the scientist's or the cat's? Taken to a more extreme level, if the cat could affect reality through observation, than why not a worm as well. The more imaginative attempts to interpret quantum behavior are the points where Cavendish and quantum physics have some interesting similarities.

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[14] Ibid. 158
[15] Ford 229.
[16] See John Gribbin, *Schrodinger's kittens and the search for reality* (London: Phoenix, 1996) 19-23.

Though she was of course not theorizing about electrons or other subatomic particles, in her universe, all matter, whether human or world, also effects and even creates realities and worlds in infinite ways. The more unorthodox, yet very popular interpretations of the quantum paradox also have remarkable and uncanny resemblance to Cavendish's thought. In the 'Many Worlds' theory, quantum reality is much more complex than we imagine. From this model, there is a world where Schrödinger's cat lives and another parallel reality where the cat dies. Each observation or measurement "of a quantum system causes the universe to split into multiple copies corresponding to all possible outcomes of the experiment" and "each of these copies of the universe is itself constantly multiplying to allow for all possible outcomes of every measurement."[17] Another variation of this interpretation, is that it is not just measurement or observation, "every time the Universe is faced with a choice at the quantum level, the entire Universe splits into as many copies of itself as it takes to carry out every possible option," allowing "infinite number of universes, each splitting into infinitely more versions of reality every split second, as all the atoms and particles in the universe(s) are faced with quantum choices and follow every possible route."[18] Yet, Cavendish also argues that there are infinite realities dividing and multiplying since "as numbers do multiply, so does the world" (*TBW* 172). As a consequence "there were more numerous worlds than the stars which appeared in these three mentioned worlds" (*TBW* 184)

The many worlds explanation for quantum phenomenon has also been interpreted as not occurring in the cosmos, but internally in the mind so that the many

[17] Hey and Walters 328 and 175.
[18] Gribbin 161, 162.

worlds interpretation shifts to a many minds interpretation. John Gribbin explains that

> when an intelligent being interacts with a quantum system the brain of the intelligent being itself [. . .] splits into as many states as it takes to 'see' every possible quantum alternative, but each split consciousness is only aware of observing one outcome to the experiment[19]

If the mind is infinitely splitting into multiple mental worlds, there is yet another parallel with Cavendish. Jay Stevenson argues that Cavendish's philosophy seems to suggest that physical reality is thought.[20] This would indicate that, like the multiple minds theory, there would be infinite minds, or at least thoughts, dividing and multiplying physical reality. Though it would be highly anachronistic to argue Cavendish was a quantum physicists, the multiple minds, selves and worlds that are created in *The Blazing World*, are uncannily similar to the multiple worlds and minds theory in quantum mechanics. Hey and Walters argues that in "the early years of quantum mechanics, [science fiction] writers struggled to incorporate the new understanding of the atom into a fictional context. Modern [science fiction] has now moved on to include multiple universes and nanotechnology as part of its standard technology base."[21] However, Cavendish seems to have had no trouble incorporating atoms, multiple worlds and minds into her fictional pieces during the seventeenth-century.

Though critics formally struggled to accept her highly imaginative mixing of science with fantasy, this is becoming less problematic in a society where science fiction is not only more popular and acceptable, but the revolutionary discoveries in

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[19] Ibid. 171.
[20] Jay Stevenson, "Imagining the Mind: Cavendish's Hobbesian Allegories," *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish*, ed. Stephen Clucas (Aldershot: Ashgate 2003) 144.
[21] Hey and Walters xi.

quantum science are also challenging classical perceptions of the nature of reality.[22] Quantum theory does not correspond to mechanical, classical rules and since Cavendish's science is not just about the macroscopic world, it should not be entirely judged or understood in a mechanical framework. Cavendish's belief that all matter is in a state of motion and flux is not as strange from the context of the subatomic particles such as electrons which are always in motion.[23] Though Cavendish initially argued that atoms are the smallest particles in matter, she later revised this belief claiming that atoms can be infinitely divided into smaller parts. This does not seem so strange or fantastical in context of quantum mechanics which has discovered that quarks and gluons are a hundred million times smaller than atoms and there are hints that there could be a sub-subatomic world.[24] Though quantum physicists would not break all of their microscopes like the Empress in the Blazing World, microscopic observation is also problematic in their field since it cannot find complete accuracy or knowledge in subatomic observations.[25]

The only scholar, to date, to link Cavendish to quantum theory is Brandy Siegfried who discusses Cavendish's ideas in relation to the idea of symmetry; the nonessentialist idea that a theory retains its shape even if a variable is altered.

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[22] For example, Elaine Walker complains that Cavendish "writes copiously on natural philosophy, war, writing and humankind's relationship with the world. Yet, she writes equally fully on fairies, talking birds, trees and castles: she creates her own mythology with Nature personified as a deity and indulges in whimsical pondering, seeming unaware of the unease which these two approaches to life sit side by side" (Elaine Walker, "Longing For Ambrosia: Margaret Cavendish and the Torment of a Restless Mind in *Poems and Fancies* (1653)," *Women's Writing* 4:3 (1997): 342).

[23] For example, perpetual "motion in the quantum world is (fortunately) commonplace. An electron in an atom never gets tired" (Ford 222).

[24] Polkinghorne, *Quantum Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, 39 and Ford 28.

[25] Since light itself is made up of subatomic particles, observing any subatomic particle under a microscope will actually effect its physical composition to some degree. Consequently, the very act of using the microscope physically alters the specimen; hence complete, accurate knowledge is impossible. See Polkinghorne, *Quantum Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, 32, 33. Hey and Walters also explain that "the practical resolution of electron microscopes is limited by technical problems

> For instance, a theory has symmetry if there is something that can be done to it -- displace its coordinates in space or time, for example --without affecting its form or equations. Most current thinkers concur that the more symmetry a theory has, the more universally valid it is. That is to say, we find it less practical (especially when attempting to define the relationship between the macro- and quantum universe) to define nature in terms of immutable laws than as interlaced capacities that remain highly (but not essentially) consistent.[26]

Siegfried argues that Cavendish uses a very similar concept of symmetry in *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* with its attached piece, *The Blazing World.* Both pieces produce similar results even though they are discussed from very different perspectives and mediums. Siegfried argues that *The Blazing World* displaces Cavendish's theory of mind and matter from fact to the realm of causality and potential. Siegfried further compares Cavendish's symmetry to the theories of quantum physicists Tsung-Dao Lee and Chen Ning Yang who

> won the Nobel Prize for showing that our laws of physics would not be exactly valid for people living in a universe that was the mirror image of our own. In other words, they reversed a variable of perspective and found that much of what we like to think of as immutable laws are in fact useful but non-essential models: such "laws" or theories meet the demands of probability or consistency, but fail the test of symmetry. The reflections, refractions, foldings, and convolutions of perspective in Cavendish's twin-volume narrative experiment (*Observations* and *Blazing World*) amount to much the same thing: by revolving some significant variables into a proliferation of perspectives, she attempts to reveal the moments where capacity trumps deterministic views of human nature and the natural world[27]

In the preface to *The Blazing World*, Cavendish initially claims that both pieces are opposite since they are "two worlds at the ends of their poles" (*TBW* 124). Though she does not use a mathematical model, as argued in previous chapters, these worlds are virtually the same even though one is the world of fiction, opposed to fact. Her

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such as defects in the lens systems, vibrations of the apparatus and of the atoms themselves" (Hey and Walters 41).

[26] Brandy Siegfried, "The City of Chance, or, Margaret Cavendish's Theory of Radical Symmetry," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 14 (2004): 9.27.

twin worlds illustrate that perspective or even the medium of communication dramatically question essentialist systems. As Cavendish's universes and characters in *The Blazing World* overlap, they multiply, fracture and refract, also demonstrating that though deterministic views are sometimes useful (particularly for creating technologies of war), it cannot adequately express the complexity of all of the natural world.

This strategy of placing similar ideas within different structures is also evident in other aspects of her work. For example, in her poem *The Circle of the Brain Cannot be Squared*, Roberto Bertuol demonstrates how the mathematical concepts in the poem are also expressed by the structure which "allows a 'multidimensional' presentation of the content" where "each element of the poem carries the same message regardless of the perspective."[28] Yet, at the same time, the poem demonstrates that humanity cannot completely understand or master nature.[29]

Although critics have been frustrated with Cavendish's tendency to embrace contradictions, contemporary theoretical thought, whether from quantum science or even postmodernism, is accepting or, at least, confronting contradictions and paradoxes from extremely different academic disciplines. Siegfried argues that "Cavendish is proposing a model which accommodates more highly differentiated, multi-dimensional thinking."[30] Cavendish's fragmented, contradictory, infinite and remarkable universe or universes are arguably much less problematic and more acceptable from the intellectual world views that are developing. Rather than

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[27] Ibid. 9.27.
[28] Roberto Bertuol, "The *Square Circle* of Margaret Cavendish: the 17th-century conceptualization of mind by means of mathematics," *Language and Literature* 10.1 (2001): 33.
[29] Ibid. 21-40.
[30] Siegfried 9.29.

listening to one perspective in her texts or perceiving contradictions as equivalent to failures, this project intends to contribute to the highly neglected aspects of her thought which explores the complexity of Cavendish's multi-dimensional, multifarious Nature and how it challenges class and gender hierarchies. Since nature, politics and culture are in constant flux in the Cavendish paradigm, she is aware that different eras will appreciate or understand reality in different ways. As a consequence of the dynamic, shifting and contingent nature of truth and reality, different time periods will have various and conflicting receptions of theoretical material. In *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, she explains that perhaps she "may meet with an age where she will be more regarded, then she is in this" and if her philosophy becomes "slighted now and buried in silence, she may perhaps rise more glorioussly hereafter" (*OUEP* sig. e1v). In many ways, Cavendish has finally found an appropriate age where she can 'rise more glorioussly'. In the year 2003 alone, five academic books were published which were entirely devoted to Cavendish.[31] Though critics have only recently begun to re-evaluate the importance of her scientific, political and theoretical positions, scholarship will benefit from examining the significance of how Cavendish's infinitely multifarious and powerful Nature plays with the boundaries that constitute power, God, self, culture and reality itself.

[31] See Stephen Clucas, *ed., A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2003); Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz, eds, *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish*, (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003); Susan James, ed., *Margaret Cavendish: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: Margaret Cavendish: Duchess of Newcastle Royalist, Writer and Romantic*, (New York: Basic Books, 2003); and Emma L. E. Rees, *Margaret Cavendish, Gender, Genre, Exile* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

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Appendix

List of Publications

Publications relating to thesis:

Walters, Lisa. "Cavendish's Letters of Subversion." Sederi 12 (2005): [page numbers pending].

Walters, Lisa. "Gender Subversion in the Science of Margaret Cavendish." *Early Modern Literary Studies*. 14 (2004): 13.1-34.

Publications relating to overall subject matter:

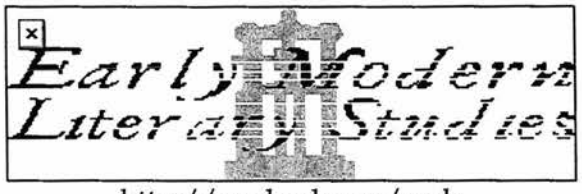
Walters, Lisa. "Chapter VIII The Earlier Seventeenth Century: General, Prose, Women's Writing." *The Year's Work in English Studies*. Vol. 85. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. [page numbers pending].

Walters, Lisa. "Review of Hero Chalmer's *Royalist Women Writers 1650-1689*." *Early Modern Literary Studies*. (2005): [page numbers pending].

Walters, Lisa. "Chapter VIII The Earlier Seventeenth Century: General, Prose, Women's Writing." *The Year's Work in English Studies*. Vol. 85. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. [page numbers pending].

Walters, Lisa. "Chapter VIII The Earlier Seventeenth Century: General, Prose, Women's Writing." *The Year's Work in English Studies*. Vol. 85. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. 401-432.

* *In The Year's Work in English Studies, I write reviews for all publications about "Women's Writing" from approximately 1660-1665 in a given year. These reviews also include all published material about Cavendish.*



http://purl.oclc.org/emls

Editor: Dr Matthew Steggle, Sheffield Hallam University, Montgomery House, 32 Collegiate Crescent, Collegiate Campus Sheffield S10 2BJ - UNITED KINGDOM
Tel: (+44) 114 225 4350 Email: M.Steggle@shu.ac.uk

Wednesday, March 23, 2005

Lisa Walters,
48 Walter Scott Ave
Edinburgh
EH16 5RJ

Dear Lisa Walters,

This letter is to confirm that *EMLS* has no objection to you reprinting your essay, "Gender Subversion in the Science of Margaret Cavendish," *Early Modern Literary Studies* Special Issue 14 (May, 2004): 13.1-34 <URL: http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si-14/wallgend.html>, as an appendix to your PhD thesis.

All the best,

Matthew Steggle
Editor, *EMLS*.

Early Modern Literary Studies

Gender Subversion in the Science of Margaret Cavendish

Lisa Walters
The University of Edinburgh
walterslisa@hotmail.com

Walters, Lisa. "Gender Subversion in the Science of Margaret Cavendish." *Early Modern Literary Studies* Special Issue 14 (May, 2004): 13.1-34 <URL: http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si-14/wallgend.html>.

1. Margaret Cavendish is best known for her plays, poetry and fiction, yet she also wrote many scientific and philosophical treatises that redefine and challenge the patriarchal assumptions within the scientific tradition. An understanding of Cavendish's theories, particularly in relation to the Scientific Revolution, will facilitate an understanding of her literature since she wrote extensively about science and often incorporated it into her fiction. Cavendish's intricate science, which includes animism, materialism, atoms and theories of multiple worlds, results in subverting the foundations of scientific knowledge and reason that maintain ideas of natural sex inequalities. Cavendish does not simply criticize the apparently unequal social roles, but her theories further challenge patriarchal metaphors embedded within the foundations of science and Western culture -- values that are still prevalent within contemporary Western thought. **[1]** Cavendish recognized the multifaceted aspects of power and examines the ideologies that make inequalities appear natural and thus, unquestionable. Throughout *Philosophical Letters*, concepts within science that were considered naturally masculine, such as reason, mind, spirit, activity and power, are intermixed with the cultural definitions of femininity and its associations with nature, irrationality, body, passivity and natural inferiority.

2. Cavendish's theories can be best understood in relation to seventeenth-century scientific conceptions of the world. Historian Hugh Kearney claims that early modern science can be loosely organized into three main scientific traditions, the scholastic, magic and mechanic sciences, all of which can be defined by their approach to nature. Mechanical philosophy, which eventually evolved into modern science, used the metaphor of a machine to describe the natural world; the magic or hermetic tradition, which included astronomy and chemistry, understood nature as a piece of artwork or music to be mastered by the magician; and scholastic science, which was taught in universities, used analogies of organisms to depict nature . Although all three sciences had different outlooks upon the world and often contradicted each other, all maintained a view of nature that held gendered implications.

3. Cavendish developed a science that utilized ideas from various traditions, yet her science challenges cultural codes that determine what was considered masculine and feminine within philosophy by redefining nature itself. Nature and woman have been historically associated together throughout Western culture. Rational knowledge is often depicted as male and in direct opposition to an irrational, female Nature. Maleness was often aligned with active, determinate form and femaleness with passive, indeterminate matter. Within these gendered dichotomies, ideas associated with maleness were superior to its opposite (see Lloyd).

4. Cavendish does explicitly define nature and matter as female, yet she challenges the patriarchal values embedded within this metaphor. She claims that there is no rest in nature and that this constant movement is not induced by an external force since "Nature hath a natural Free-will and power of self-moving" (*Philosophical Letters* 225). Nature is not merely an empty, lifeless body that is governed, but is capable of movement within itself. Nature is an active, moving, powerful being for "matter is not meerly Passive, but always Active" (*PL* 145). In reversing the active/passive dichotomy, associations between body, nature, and woman with passivity are disrupted.

5. If Nature is one active, self-moving, continued body, then it must sustain itself without the aid of any external or supernatural power. Mechanical science is questioned in her rejection of the idea that movement is caused by an external force since this science portrayed nature as a motionless machine moved or set into motion by God. Cavendish argues that external forces do not govern nature since "Nature moveth not by force, but freely" (*PL* 23). A lifeless machine or body that only moves through external force depicts a vision of the universe that contains violent connotations, particularly in context of its gender associations. Nature is a passive, lifeless entity that is forcefully and even violently moved.

6. This conception of nature relates to the mechanist, Francis Bacon, who used the metaphor of a feminine nature that is raped and dominated by a male scientist for knowledge. Bacon discusses how for previous science, the "true sons of knowledge has been trying to "find a way at length into [nature's] inner chambers," yet has failed to discover her secrets: "though it grasps and snatches at nature, yet can never take hold of her. Certainly what is said of opportunity of fortune is most true of nature; she has a lock in front, but is bald behind" (64). Nature is a passive, female body to penetrate and violate by male reason for the pursuit of knowledge. The male/female binary is utilized to portray a relation between knowledge and sexual power. Power can be obtained over nature as man has power over woman. The mutually reaffirming metaphors linking women and nature potently demonstrate Bacon's claim that "human knowledge and human power meet in one" (153).

7. Cavendish disrupts this notion of power linked with reason as she argues that nature is incomprehensible and diminishes the idea of human grandeur and mastery in comparison to the natural world. Nature and 'femininity' are not only active, but they are also endued with reason and knowledge:

> But Nature is wiser then any of her Creatures can conceive; for she knows how to make, and how to dissolve, form, and transform, with facility and ease, without any difficulty; for her actions are all easie and free, yet so subtil, curious and various, as not any part or creature of Nature can exactly or throughly trace her ways, or know her wisdom (*PL* 476, 477).

   Nature, and its associations with woman, is not a passive vehicle to be mastered since it is not only wise, but an entity beyond human understanding.

8. In contrast to the mechanist belief that God was the force behind the analogy of the world as machine, Cavendish states that God is an omnipotent entity within the universe, yet it is nature that is motion, knowledge and life within the natural world.

> when I do attribute an Infinite Power, Wisdom, Knowledg, etc. to Nature, I do not understand a Divine, but a Natural Infinite Wisdom and Power, that is, such as properly belongs to Nature, and not a supernatural, as is in God; For Nature having Infinite parts of Infinite degrees, must also have an Infinite natural wisdom to order her natural Infinite parts and actions, and consequently an Infinite natural power to put her wisdom into act; and so of the rest of her attributes, which are all natural (*PL* 8, 9).

This distinction between divine and natural power not only allows Cavendish to avoid complete heresy, but also allows nature to be omnipotent within her realm so that she can function without God or any other immaterial force. Although nature is ultimately created and subservient to God, she is distinct from God and still contains a powerful, active role. There is nothing supernatural in Nature's domain and nature is omnipotent through God's command; "Therefore it is probable, God has ordained Nature to work in her self by his Leave, Will, and Free Gift" (*PL* 11). God is enigmatic and unknowable, granting nature the power of creation, motion, life and knowledge within the material world, contrary to the mechanist view of nature being a lifeless, passive machine.

9. Although mechanism emphasized a more secular world-view, the magic or hermetic tradition relied on spirituality. Yet both magic and mechanism held parallel views upon the state of matter. Similar to mechanism, hermetic science relied upon the idea of matter being moved by force. The magic tradition believed matter had spirit, but it was an active spirit that impregnated or suffused passive, inert matter. **[2]** Though hermetic science still used active/passive dichotomies to describe matter, it simultaneously also emphasized harmony and union in nature. Evelyn Fox Keller claims that as a result, it held more egalitarian gender metaphors for "whereas Bacon sought domination, the alchemists asserted the necessity of allegorical, if not actual, cooperation between male and female" (*Reflections* 48). Yet the magic tradition is the science that contrasts most with Cavendish's philosophy.

10. Cavendish disagrees with the hermetic explanation of immaterial entities being the primal cause of natural phenomenon and attempts to explain and understand nature in material terms. The emphasis that active spirit causes motion is disrupted as Cavendish disputes Van Helmont's claim that spirits are what control nature since "natural Matter stands in no need to have some Immaterial or Incorporeal substance to move, rule, guide and govern her, but she is able enough to do it all her self" (*PL* 194). The idea of a self-moving, active and material nature redefines body and nature in such a way that she has become a force that cannot be controlled or governed, whether it is by God, science or immaterial substances.

11. The hermetic emphasis upon mysticism was problematic for Cavendish not only due to her materialism, but also because she believed science should focus upon the physical, natural world, rather than on spiritual mathematics and numerology. Mathematics cannot discover divinity or God's mind since it is not "possible that Divinity can be proved by Mathematical Demonstrations; for if Nature be not able to do it, much less is Art" (*PL* 211). If the universe is entirely material, the scientist cannot prove religion through their arts and limited corporeal perspective.

12. Cavendish further argues that hermetic scientists' attempts to discover God's

secrets represent human arrogance rather than constructive scientific pursuits:

> I am amazed, when I see men so conceited with their own perfections and abilities, (I may rather say, with their imperfections and weaknesses) as to make themselves God's privy Councellors, and his Companions, and partakes of all the sacred Mysteries, Designs, and hidden secrets of the Incomprehensible and Infinite God. O the vain Presumption, Pride, and Ambition of wretched Man! (*PL* 314).

Humanity is ignorant and will not be able to discover God's secrets, contesting the hierarchy maintained by the magic, mechanist and organic traditions that humans were superior to other creatures and closer to God. Scientists striving for the secrets of God and the universe are comparable to the devil and his fall from heaven because their pride and ambition parallels Satan's aspiration to be like God: "some men will be as presumptuous as the Devil, to enquire into Gods secret actions, although they be sure that they cannot be known by any Creature" (*PL* 349). In linking Satan with scientists aspiring to gain powers, Cavendish questions the ethics of the belief that humans could obtain God-like powers through their science.

13. Since Cavendish emphasizes the diversity, plurality and infinite qualities of nature, as opposed to the limitations of human knowledge and ability, she could not accept the belief that one medicine could remedy the vast amount of diseases:

> And what would the skill of Physicians be, if one remedy should cure all diseases? Why should they take so much pains in studying the various causes, motions, and tempers of diseases, if one medicine had a general power over all? Nay, for what use should God have created such a number of different simples, Vegetables, and Minerals, if one could do all the business? (*PL* 390).

Synthetic medicine would be working against nature since "Chymists torture Nature worst of all; for they extract and distil her beyond substance, nay, into no substance, if they could" (*PL* 491). It attempting to transmute and alter natural substances, the chemist or alchemist is enacting a God-like position where nature is being controlled by an external force as she is violently and unnaturally used.

14. Although Cavendish disagreed with the hermetic approach to medicine, she enthusiastically agreed with the scholastic, organic medical practices that used natural rather than synthetic remedies **[3]** which she understood as working with nature, rather than trying to usurp or possess her powers. Since she agreed with scholasticism in its practice of medicine, it would seem that she was embracing the scholastic tradition. Both Cavendish and this tradition based their science upon analogies of the body and believed that there was an animistic quality in matter, yet her conception of body and motion differs and challenges Aristotelian definitions of matter and consequently the gender order that it sustains.

15. Gender analogies are transgressed as Cavendish disputes the scholastic conception of matter in relation to corruption. The scholastic tradition conceived matter on earth as corruptible, whereas the matter which composed the heavens was incorruptible (see Dampier). Since women were associated with matter and nature, and men had a closer likeness to God, women would be located within the negative, corruptible side of the heaven/earth, incorruptible/corruptible binary. Cavendish rejects the notion that anything can be corrupt in nature since all

"Matter is Eternal and Incorruptible" (*PL* 460). This statement demonstrates how Cavendish subverts the multiple, reaffirming cultural metaphors that signify and reinforce gender. As Cavendish collapses the dualism between the heavens and earth, she simultaneously challenges the definitions of gender that are related to this dichotomy.

16. Although Cavendish does relate to many aspects of scholasticism, signifiers of gender are still questioned. She agrees with the Aristotelian notion that everything on earth is in constant change and motion, yet she argues that this would include all of matter within the whole body of nature, including the heavens. Since all matter is in constant change and motion, she conflicts with the scholastic tenant that the heavens never change and have perfect motion and the earth has imperfect motion. The heaven/earth distinction is again confounded as all of matter and the universe is composed from the powerful, feminine force of matter, imbued with life and reason.

17. If nature is such an infinite and continuously active force, the scholastic explanation for motion, that all matter is directed to fulfill its final cause or purpose, is made problematic. Although the theory of final purpose may appear to relate to Cavendish's notion that matter has an animistic, self-motion, yet this movement towards a final cause does not mean that all matter had life and knowledge. Matter sought its end purpose because it was seeking its natural place in the universe and once it reached its final purpose, it was at rest (see Shapin). Alternatively, Cavendish believed that matter was motion itself:"for Matter, Motion and Figure, are but one thing, individable" and was never at rest (*PL* 11). Furthermore, matter was not searching for its natural place, but that matter could not exist without place:"all bodies carry their places along with them, for body and place go together and are inseparable" (*PL* 67). A body does not move through various places, for that would suggest that the body is not connected or interacting with the matter that it is immersed within:

> Say a man travels a hundred miles, and so a hundred thousand paces; but yet this man has not been in a hundred thousand places, for he never had any other place but his own, he hath joined and separated himselfe from a hundred thousand, nay millions of parts, but he has left no places behind him (*PL* 102).

Cavendish's labyrinthine body of matter is further complicated and expanded in this definition of place that is not distinct from body. Matter is infinitely interactive and humanity is constantly mixing, becoming part of or physically interacting with the material environment. The distinctions between humanity, body, man, woman and nature are blurred and confused.

18. As Cavendish deconstructs various dichotomies and categories, she demonstrates how value systems and social hierarchy are maintained and reaffirmed through various institutions and knowledges, giving the appearance of a stable, unchanging truth. Rather than working within a patriarchal framework and accepting gender roles as a permanent truth, Cavendish conceives how the world is structured in gender/power relations and attempts to restructure the gendered assumptions in science. As Cavendish critiques and absorbs aspects from various sciences, she playfully revises scientific metaphors and ideas that maintain sex hierarchy. She claims that the sciences cannot master nature for art "hath found out some things profitable and useful for the life of others, yet she is but a handmaid to Nature, and not her Mistress" (*PL* 362). Art, which encompasses

'male' philosophy and science, is portrayed as not only a woman, but a female servant to Nature, a metaphor that further disrupts and plays with the links between science, reason and power with masculinity.

19. Since nature had so many cultural associations with woman, Cavendish attacks and ridicules her contemporaries and their assumption that nature is a body, void of reason:

> some of our modern Philosophers think they do God good service, when they endeavour to prove Nature, as Gods good Servant, to be stupid, ignorant, foolish and mad, or any thing rather then wise, and yet they believe themselves wise, as if they were no part of Nature; but I cannot imagine any reason why they should rail on her, except Nature had not given them as great a share or portion, as she hath given to others; for children in this case do often rail at their Parents, for leaving their Brothers and Sisters more then themselves. (*PL* 162, 163).

Cavendish places humanity into a humbling position where only Nature as a whole body united has knowledge of the entire material world and humanity is not God's favorite, but their vanity is akin to little children who whine for want of more attention and power. The scientist's desire for power is ironically derived upon irrational emotions such as jealousy. If humanity is only a part within Nature's body, then "there can never be in one particular Creature a perfect knowledg of all things in Nature" (*PL* 407). As a result, Cavendish conceives human knowledge as fragmented and limited.

20. Since humanity is merely a small fraction of the body of nature, its knowledge and perspective cannot transcend its limited position within the natural world. Male reason and knowledge are not distinct from body, matter and femaleness, but are limited creatures within her.

21. Nature and matter cannot be controlled since it is the force that creates humanity itself for "the cause of every particular material Creature is the onely and Infinite Matter" (*PL* 11). Matter itself is one united mass or body that is continuously moving in infinite ways to create a diverse and various universe:

> for though Matter is one and the same in its Nature, and never changes, yet the motions are various, which motions are the several actions of one and the same Natural Matter; and this is the cause of so many several Creatures; for self-moving matter by its self-moving power can act several ways, modes or manners; and had not natural matter a self-acting power, there could not be any variety in Nature; for Nature knows of no rest, there being no such thing as rest in Nature; but she is in a perpetual motion, I mean self-motion (*PL* 163, 164).

Thus, it is Nature's activeness and will that cause and produce the universe. In terms of gender, this signifies that femaleness and body are the active powers and will that create the world.

22. Using categories and dualisms that would be familiar and embedded within Western thought, Cavendish questions and subverts such conceptions by placing them in a different context. For example, though she does use an active/passive

dualism in her descriptions of matter, she seems to use these concepts in order to deconstruct them and their associated gender ideologies. She claims there are two types of matter within nature, the animate and inanimate matter yet she claims they are so thoroughly intermixed that nothing can exist without both, "by reason in all parts of nature there is a commixture of animate and inanimate matter" (*PL* 99). Although Cavendish creates this distinction, all matter always contains both aspects; thus all matter is able to be in continual motion "for the animate forces or causes the inanimate matter to work with her; and thus one is moving, the other moved." Since every part of nature has both types of matter, everything is simultaneously active and passive as it moves and is moved.

23. As Cavendish shifts meanings of the active/passive binary, she also uses a mind/body dichotomy in her description of matter. Yet, she creates these distinctions within matter in order to question the values they support. In *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, she argues that that there is one aspect in matter that contains reason and another that contains sense, body and life, "since the Animate matter is of two Degrees, Sensitive and Rational, I call the Sensitive the Life, and the Rational the Soul" (sig. e). This initially appears like Aristotelian thought in which rational substances control and are superior to grosser subjects that are devoid of reason (Stevenson 537). Yet these forms of matter are completely intermixed so that everything in existence has reason, body, motion and life; thus the mind/body distinction is not only blended, but placed within a different value system since "all degrees of Only and Infinite matter are Intermixed" (*PAPO* 4). Life, power and knowledge are brought into concepts such as nature, matter and body that were entrenched within the feminine side of the male/female metaphors. The concept of mind distinct from matter is now placed in an animistic universe where all of nature has reason:

> there is life and knowledg in all parts of nature, by reason in all parts of nature there is a commixture of animate and inanimate matter: and this Life and Knowledg is sense and reason, or sensitive and rational corporeal motions, which are all one thing with animate matter without any distinction or abstraction, and can no more quit matter, then matter can quit motion (*PL* 99).

Mind is not superior over matter and femininity cannot be defined as irrational, as both are thoroughly intermixed as one living, knowing entity.

24. Cavendish's universe is a conglomeration of reason, body and knowledge. The mind is an entity that functions like a physical body: "the Mind Feeds as greedily on Thoughts, as an Hungry Stomack doth Meat," confusing the conventional mind/body categories (*PAPO* 268). If mind and matter are conceived as the same, then signifiers of masculinity and femininity are confused, collapsing the gender hierarchy that places men within an ideologically superior position.

25. In contrast to the Cartesian mind/body dualism, Cavendish claims that the mind and body are both material and thus, inseparable. "For the Natural Mind is not less material then the body" (*PL* 149) and thus humans cannot have immaterial knowledge. Only Nature as a whole body united has knowledge of the entire material world since her creatures are only pieces that together compose her body and they can only obtain fragments and pieces of this wisdom. Consequently, all creatures in nature are simultaneously wise and ignorant.

> for if there were not ignorance through the division of Parts, every

> man and other creatures would know alike; and there is no better proof, that matter, or any particular creature in nature is not governed by a created Immaterial Spirit, then that knowledg is in parts (*PL* 178).

No aspect of nature can either comprehend or be entirely ignorant of the whole infinite body in which they are a small part of. Since all perspectives and knowledge are to some degree valid and true, none can claim perfection; "no particular Creature in Nature can have any exact or perfect knowledg of Natural things, and therefore opinions cannot be infallible truths" (*PL* 246). Perhaps this is why Cavendish characteristically depicts various and contradictory opinions and perspectives upon one subject. Since knowledge is distributed or divided amongst body and matter, no single entity has a privileged perspective for "there is no part of Nature that hath not life and knowledg" (PL 98, 99). Cavendish conceives an animistic universe where not only humanity, but every aspect of the material world is wisdom. Human reason is only one aspect within a vast, infinite body.

26. Human knowledge appears insignificant within this wider view of the universe. Nature is goddess-like, yet is corporeal and too vast and infinite to be an anthropomorphic character. Her knowledge and power is divided and distributed throughout the material world:

> though they have not the speech of Man, yet thence doth not follow, that they have no Intelligence at all. But the Ignorance of Men concerning other Creatures is the cause of despising other Creatures, imagining themselves as petty Gods in Nature (*PL* 40, 41)

Many forms of knowledge within Nature may be incomprehensible or imperceptible to humanity. Our knowledge is limited by our material, sensory perceptions. Other forms of knowledge may possibly exist beyond our abilities "for other Creatures may know and perceive as much as Animals, although they have not the same Sensitive Organs, nor the same manner or way of Perception" (*PL* 59). There can be no human supremacy or natural hierarchy in matter within this view of the universe since all creatures have their own peculiar knowledge and perspective. The male scientist cannot dominate a female nature if human knowledge is an infinite fraction in a vast body of nature. Cavendish expands and complicates the natural world into a labyrinth of animistic, conscious, living matter.

27. As Cavendish complicates and extends nature, she complains that a scientist often "takes a part for the whole, to wit, this visible World for all Nature, when as this World is onely a part of Nature, or Natural Matter, and there may be more and Infinite worlds besides" (*PL* 460). If there are multiple worlds within the mass of Nature, how can a tiny fragment of this infinite, complex mass, understand, control or dominate the whole?

28. If the body of nature is infinite then there could be more worlds than an individual could comprehend. Cavendish's theory of multiple worlds can be better understood in context of atoms. She conceives even particles as small as atoms as having their own life and knowledge. If every aspect of nature, whether it is as small as an atom, has life and reason, then there could be infinite worlds that are imperceptible to our senses. For example, there could be a world in an earring, as described in her earlier poetry (see *Poems and Fancies*). This theory of matter expands beyond human experience and comprehension since there are worlds

within worlds that are too small, large or enigmatic for human comprehension and our senses are too limited to be able to perceive or understand them. Since even thoughts are material, people can create worlds with their thoughts as was done by the characters in Cavendish's novel, *The Blazing World*. **[4]**

29. Although Cavendish discusses atoms and multiple worlds, in *Philosophical Letters*, she disclaims her previous atomic theories. Although she dismisses atoms, Cavendish refers the readers to her previous books and even to particular pages in order to understand her atomism. Jay Stevenson explains that the reasons for this strange paradox are partially because Cavendish's atomism was a potentially dangerous position to claim with its associations with atheism and unorthodoxy and also because disagreement and contradiction is precisely the state of Cavendish's atoms. He claims that this later shift in her science should not be taken at face value and her supposed revised science that excludes atoms is virtually the same philosophy but with different terminology (Stevenson 537). Cavendish argues that atoms couldn't exist,

> for if Every and Each Atome were of a Living Substance, and had Equal Power, Life and Knowledge, and Consequently, a Free-will and Liberty, and so Each and Every one were as Absolute as an other, they would hardly Agree in one Government, and as unlikely as Several Kings would Agree in one Kingdom, or rather as Men, if every one should have an Equal Power, would make a Good Government; and if it should Rest upon Consent and Agreement, like Human Governments, there would be as many Alterations and Confusions of Worlds, as in Human States and Governments (*PAPO* c2, c3).

Cavendish's reason for disclaiming her atomist theories actually resembles and parallels her scientific theories which claim that all matter has Free-will, life and knowledge. This statement results in affirming her atomism and making a statement about humanity. **[5]** Since humanity can never find consensus and agree upon one opinion this indicates that the disparity in human opinion will always be infinite. Yet, according to her science, such conflicts are natural and necessary since this description of humanity is also a reflection of the state of nature. These disagreements along with consensus are the glue that cements atoms and reality together. Antipathy and sympathy between atomic particles are what form the world. The variety in the one body of nature creates an infinite variety of reactions amongst its entities in regards to each other, creating infinite worlds and creatures. Some parts of matter have various degrees of negative, positive or neutral reactions towards one another and this is the glue or cement that holds forms within matter together. **[6]** Thus there can be no true, perfect or unchanging government, since human opinions and governments are as variable as the changes and variety in atoms and the natural world.

30. This suggests that there is no natural hierarchy since all creatures even as small as atoms are absolute with free-will, knowledge and need to disagree to make matter into forms. The body of nature is in constant conflict where there is no supernatural order placed upon the material world. If there is no supernatural or divine rank this in many ways makes Cavendish's royalism problematic. If every aspect of nature has free-will, is equal and "ha[s] an equal power [which] would make a Good Government," then one entity would not have a divine right to a hierarchical position such as a monarch.

31. Not only does atomism question her Royalism, but also her theories of the soul in relation to matter question the common critical assumption that she advocates hierarchy. All parts of Nature including atoms are not only active, powerful and imbued with reason, but also contain equal soul. In depicting Nature as active and self-moving, yet corporeal, Cavendish creates an animistic, material universe where everything has life and soul:

> there is not any Creature or part of nature without this Life and Soul; and that not onely Animals, but also Vegetables, Minerals and Elements, and what more is in Nature, are endued with this Life and Soul, Sense and Reason: and because this Life and Soul is a corporeal Substance, it is both dividable and composable (*PL* b3).

Although materialism and animism may appear paradoxical, Cavendish defines the soul as corporeal, a presence within all matter, that is not supernatural or exclusive to humanity: "though there is but one Soul in infinite Nature, yet that soul being dividable into parts, every part is a soul in every single creature, were the parts no bigger in quantity then an atome" (*PL* 433). There is no true self or soul, but infinite, dizzying amounts of living, knowing souls within one organism since even the atoms within a human have soul. There is no death within this paradigm, only changes within atoms. [7] Although a person or creature may die, the matter with which they were composed will continue to be endued with life, soul and motion. In a similar manner, matter is never created, but only moves and changes since "one Creature is produced by another, by the dividing and uniting, joyning and disjoyning of the several parts of Matter, and not by substanceless Motion out of new Matter" (*PL* 431). Matter exists as a plurality of states as the various forms compose, dissolve and continuously change. In redefining the concept of soul and blending it with materiality, Cavendish again transgresses dualisms that contain gender associations. The associations between masculinity with divinity are blended into the cultural definitions of femininity and its links with nature and body.

32. In conceiving matter as one active, living mass, where the various parts continuously transform, create and dissolve one another, Cavendish emphasizes a connection between all matter: "I cannot conceive how any thing can be by it self in Nature, by reason there is nothing alone and single in Nature, but all are inseparable parts of one body" (*PL* 248) and consequently, "there is no part that can subsist singly by it self, without dependence upon each other" (*PL* 117). The emphasis upon the connection between matter again exemplifies Cavendish's characteristic resistance to dualism and hierarchy. Cavendish does not just deconstruct hierarchy between man and woman, but questions hierarchy and binaries of all kinds. All of matter is part of the same body and thus humanity or any other entity is not distinct or superior to any other part in nature.

33. Cavendish systematically deconstructs metaphors, analogies and cultural associations that define gender, recognizing the multifaceted dimensions of a patriarchal social reality. Cavendish's theories demonstrate how the belief in natural gender differences and, consequently, male superiority is entrenched within the way society perceives the world. Power does not merely function in social interactions, but is supported and justified by an ideological system. Throughout her texts, Cavendish attacks in multiple, diverse ways, the metaphors that define gender within her society.

34. Categories and binaries that many scientific and cultural metaphors are based

upon do not operate within Cavendish's active, living, infinite force called Nature. **[8]** Within this world view, prevalent gendered conceptions of nature, matter, mind cannot accord or be reconciled within her universe. Cavendish mixes and hybridizes categories and cultural metaphors, challenging common, accepted perceptions of the world while simultaneously disrupting patriarchal metaphors embedded within scientific traditions. Rather than simplifying, universalizing or placing the world and morality into a comprehensible box, Cavendish complicates and stretches the universe into dizzying perspectives, where she cannot be restrained by categories, science and patriarchal traditions.

Notes

1. Evelyn Fox Keller notes that Cavendish's critique upon the new science has a resemblance to contemporary feminist criticism of scientific discourse; there is "a rather startling similarity between Cavendish's position and a post-Kuhnian and even a proto-feminist critique of the rational bases of mechanical science" ("Producing Petty Gods," 451).

2. An individual could thus manipulate the natural world by controlling the active spirit within bodies. See Harman 7,8.

3. "I am confident [natural remedies], hath rescued more lives, then the Universal Medicine, could Chymists find it out, perchance would do" (*PL* 383).

4. "[C]an any mortal be a creator? Yes, answered the spirits" (*Blazing World* 185).

5. Critics such as Emma Rees and Anna Battigelli have also perceived a relation between human behavior and atoms in Cavendish's literature. Rees demonstrates how the self is placed in comparison to an atom while Battigeli argues that the "physical universe, the political world, the mind - each of these could be envisioned as an atomist system" (Rees; see also Battigelli 39).

6. Cavendish wonders what "*glue or cement holds the parts of hard matter in Stones and Metals together*"? She answers that this cement is "Consistent or retentive corporeal motions, by an agreeable union and conjunction in the several parts of Metal or Stone" (*PL* 167). Thus, when matter is sympathetic, without aversion, a union is created. This explains Cavendish's dislike of the hermetic emphasis upon peace and harmony for antipathy and strife is necessary within her paradigm.

7. "[W]hat is commonly named death, is but an alteration or change of corporeal motions" (*PL* 411).

8. Even within her literature, Cavendish "is most engaged by that which troubles or resists categorization, thereby engendering reflection on the nature and function of categorization itself. Both Cavendish herself, and her writings, have similarly challenged categorization" (*Blazing World* xi).

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Early Modern Literary Studies
HOME PAGE